- The life of Christ's athlete -

Saint John Chrysostom

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Chapter 1

Athletes of Christ

In the first centuries of Christianity, the men and women who fought to gain the glory of the saints were called Christ's athletes. A saint achieves during his life performances that other people fail to achieve. Sometimes his performances are officially recognized by the Church. In this case, he appears in the calendar. The official recognition of a saint, however, takes place only as an exception and only for a very small number of people. Most saints are ignored by the calendar. The few saints whom the Church recommends for public veneration receive this posthumous consecration. Never in their lifetime.

Many people wanted to become saints. Their struggles to acquire the cleanliness necessary for holiness were spectacular. More spectacular and much tougher than the fights in the arenas. To achieve cleanliness, Christ's ath letes fought against their body, against sleep, against hunger, against pain, agai nst their own thoughts, against instincts. It was a merciless fight, fought day a nd night, throughout an entire life. A thrilling fight with no respite.

Saint John Chrysostom decided to become a saint since he was a teenager, when he was still in school. A decision taken in full knowledge of the case and after a mature consideration. Other young people decide in their adolescence to become generals, champion athletes, explorers. John Chrysostom decided to become a saint. All his life he had no other ideal.

To attain sainthood, he faced all opponents on all fields and won all battles.

His record is a huge list of victories. The victories of John Chrysostom were so categorical that he is one of the few saints mentioned in the calendar both by the Eastern Church (Orthodox) and the Western (catholic) church.

The model of the saints

Any man can become a saint with the condition that he loves Christ. John Chrysostom knew this well. He told his believers to imitate the Holy Apostle Paul, because any man can imitate him and become like him: "Let us imitate him, my brothers, for he is a man of the same nature as ours, but because he showed a great love for Christ, he entered the heavens and now has a place there with the angels. If you want to force yourself and kindle the same flame in you, we could imitate this holy apostle. If this would've been impossible, he wouldn't have said: "Be imitators of me, as I am an imitator of Christ". (1 Corinthians 11, 1)

The calendar is proof that any man can become a saint. There is no restriction regarding age, sex, profession, race or nationality. We find here, side by side, saints of all nationalities, of all colors.

There are saints who in life were emperors alongside others who were slaves. Almost all professions are represented here. There are saints who were kings, monks, nobles, merchants, teachers, workers, gardeners, shepherds, lawyers, doctors, tax agents, magistrates, beggars, servants, carpenters, shoemakers, blacksmiths, fishermen.

Even the era does not matter much to become saints. There are people in the calendar who acquired this glory in the first century of Christianity, others who lived in the Middle Ages and others who gained holiness in our age.

But world championships, arena fights, and Olympic competitions are mere child's play compared to the battles a man must fight to become a saint.

Saint John Chrysostom was one of the blessed ones who knew how to follow grace and reach this glory.

Closer to the sky

Saint John Golden Mouth (Chrysostom) is an athlete of Christ who differs from his calendar colleagues, i.e. from the other saints. In one life he fought on two fronts: he fought to acquire individual holiness... It was a terrible fight. After he had defeated every particle of his body and destroyed every enemy and every obstacle that could prevent him from reaching heaven, he began another battle: the battle to raise the Church of Christ with the whole multitude of believers on the heights of Christian holiness and purity. The fight for the Church is the act of the most complete love for people. The church is like a fortress, within whose walls ordinary people, people who do not have exceptional qualities, are protected. Besides, at that time, Christianity was called "true philosophy".

Entering the Church, the common man can live like the tenant of a big building, a few floors above the ground, above the pitiful earthly life, and a few floors closer to heaven. Christ's athletes, who fight for the Church, actually fight to give people the possibility of a higher human condition, to live their lives at an altitude worthy of a man: a few meters higher from the ground and at least a few meters closer to the sky.

In the second period of his life, John Chrysostom fought like a champion to bring people to the Church and then he never stopped raising the Church together with all the people it included above the earth, closer to heaven, where people can breathe in a cleaner, more dignified, calmer atmosphere.

Antuza and Secundus

No one comes into the world holy. No one is ever born a saint. Man becomes holy. Holiness is conquered. The birth of John Chrysostom is identical to the birth of any other John on earth. It has nothing exceptional. It should only be noted that he was born to rich parents. This privilege is reserved on earth for a small number of Johns.

His father was a general. He commanded the cavalry of the Roman Empire in Syria. His rank was (in the words of the time) Magister Militum Orientis. It was a high degree. The full name of the general who was the father of John Chrysostom is not known. It is only known that his name was Secundus. Roman names were composed of two or three names. Of these two or three names of the general, we only know one. That's all. Greek customs were respected in Syria. Now the Greeks gave a man only one name. According to the Greek custom, the chroniclers have therefore preserved only one name of the general: Secundus, as well as one name of his son: John.

The grey sided hair general married a sixteen-year-old girl from Antioch, where he had his garrison. The young girl's name was Antuza. The first child of the general and Antuza was a daughter. The general wanted fervently to have a son. He had it. The second child was a boy whom the parents named John, the future saint.

The year of John's birth is unknown. As the biographers claim, it is certain that he was born between 345 and 349. General Secundus died very shortly after the birth of John. Antuza, John's mother, was therefore left a widow with two children before she turned twenty years old. A sister of the deceased general, whose name was Sabiniana, also lived in Antuza's house. There were, therefore, four people: Sabiniana, Antuza, John and his sister, two years older than him and whose name has not been preserved. Antuza decided never to marry again.

Antuza devoted the rest of her life to the education of her children and the administration of the assets left by the general. Ioan talks about his mother like this: "She used to say to me: I was a little happy, my child, about the virtue of your father. This happiness was soon snatched from me by divine Providence. The pain of his death has joined with that of your birth. He left you an orphan and left me an inheritance of all the evils of widowhood; evils that only women who have tried them can know. There are no words that can express the troubles and misfortunes to which a young girl who has just left her father's house, without any experience, is knocked down by a blow as terrible as it is unexpected, and forced from now on to obligations that do not belong either to her age or to her sex. She must correct the indifference of the servants, keep in check their wickedness, repel the machinations of the relatives, defend herself against the greed of the tax agents, and this despite her disgust and their merciless demands". (*About Priesthood*, book One)

Although very young and lacking any experience, Antuza handled herself perfectly. She knew how to face all the hardships inherent in widowhood. She could later confess to her son, the future saint: "You will not reproach me for diminishing the goods that your father left you despite the hardships and dangers that widowhood brings with it, and which for so many other women had fatal consequences. I kept these goods for you in their integrity, although I spared nothing to give you a solid and brilliant education." (*About Priesthood*, book One)

John's mother was, therefore, a heroic mother, as all mothers on earth normally are. Antuza knew how to face all difficulties with her practical intuition, intuition that is in the nature of women. Antuza's concerns, anxieties and hopes were identical to the concerns, anxieties and hopes of all widowed mothers in all countries and at all times.

John's biographers wrote that Antuza was a Christian and very pious. She was certainly pious to the extent that all single Christian women in the world are pious. Moreover, the piety of single mothers is very great. It's deep. Authentic.

Euroasia. Antioch.

The city where John was born was called Antioch. The name of this city no longer exists on any map. On the site of Antioch is a Turkish town called Antakiyah (Antakya, Antioch). Located on the banks of the Orontes River in Asia Minor, it is part of the current Turkish Republic. Antioch was not a city of Asia Minor, but a big city of Europe. John was born in one of the most representative cities of Europe. Europe is composed of all the cities that have inherited Greek culture.

At the time of John Chrysostom, Europe's borders were on the Euphrates; and Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor were an integral part of Europe. The capitals of European culture were Alexandria and Antioch. These were more European than Athens. The Greek tradition flourished in them. Europe became aware - for the first time - of its own existence in the Greek world, in the 5th century before Christ. European borders have always been mobile. In the time of Alexander Macedon they were in Asia. Then, Europe began to shrink towards the West. Asia conquered the European territory piece by piece. The European spirit was burned by Asia, cauterized, we could say, on the entire surface of the earth. One fine day, Asia Minor realized that it was no longer in Europe, but in Asia.

Therefore, Asia extended more and more over Europe, and Europe retreated more and more towards the Atlantic.

In the Middle Ages, the border of Europe was on the Danube. With the Turks, Asia reached Vienna, and the European frontier was for a while in Vienna. Today (in 1957, in the midst of the cold war and the division of the continent between a capitalist West and a communist East - editor's note), the border is on the Elbe, in the heart of Germany. Asia Minor is now in full Asia, quite far from Europe, from which it is completely cut off.

At the time, when Saint Paul and the other apostles of Christ were preaching in Asia Minor, Cappadocia, Antioch, Ephesus and the other cities - that we read about in the New Testament - were in full Europe. They bathed in full Greco-Roman tradition. They were more European than today's Swiss or Belgian cities.

The fact that John Chrysostom was born in this great European city, which was Antioch, had a profound influence on his life.

At that time, Antioch was one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It was built on the banks of the Orontes River, on seven hills, about 1100 kilometers from Constantinople and 30 kilometers from the sea shore.

In the 4th century after Christ, i.e. in the era in which John the Golden Mouth lived, contemporaries called Antioch the "Golden City", "Pearl of the Orient", "Beautiful Antioch", "Voluptuous Antioch", "Antioch of pleasures", "Sensual Antioch".

The golden city had around half a million inhabitants; it had enchanting lighting, amphitheatres, baths, grand buildings. It had everything that a metropolis of that century had to have. Antioch was one of the wonderful cities of the Roman Empire.

All the emperors of Rome visited it and left gifts. Caesar visited it in 47 BC. H. Octavian, Tiberius, Traian, Hadrian, Justinian spent some time in it and beautified it by building monuments. Diocletian built a palace, Constantine built a church. Titus adorned sensual Antioch with seraphim brought as spoils of war from destroyed Jerusalem. Emperor Commodus wanted the Olympic games to be held in Antioch. Herod, the king of the Jews, gave him two porches and a marble pavement.

But the greatest glory of Antioch was that here, for the first time, the disciples of Christ took the name of Christians. This happened in the year 42. Until then they were called Nazarenes or Galileans. Barnabas, Paul and Peter preached in this city.

The Church of Antioch was founded by the apostles of Christ themselves. It was one of the Christian capitals of the world. A few years before the birth of John Chrysostom, in 341, a synod of about 100 bishops took place in Antioch, a synod that fixed an important number of Church canons. Although this synod was not a strictly orthodox one, the 25 canons it fixed are still in force.

Precisely on the basis of these canons fixed in Antioch shortly before his birth, John will be sent to his death. This synod was not the only one held in Antioch. Another 30 synods took place in this city, which was - together with Rome, Constantinople and Alexandria - one of the capitals of the Church. The majority of the population was Christian. The fact that John Golden Mouth saw the light of day in Antioch had a great influence on his life. Part of the glory of John the Golden Mouth is a reflection of the glory of Antioch, his hometown.

The future saints also suffer the influences of the era and the place in which they were born like all other people. The splendor of this city from that time has been preserved untouched throughout the centuries in the work of the saint. Nowadays, the city of gold and marble is gone like all earthly things. On the site of Antioch, 1100 km from Constantinople, on the banks of the Orontes River, there is a small Turkish town with 26,000 inhabitants specializing in the manufacture of soap and oils with which the women of Asia anoint their faces. At Antakiyah (Antakya, Antioch) today there are only 4000 Christians. That's all.

Studies

Another important fact in the life of the future saint, was the appearance in Antioch, in the year 354, of a famous rhetorician. His name was Libanius and he was 40 years old when he reappeared in the city of Antioch. Everyone knew the name of Libanius from one end of the Roman empire to the other, from England to the Euphrates.

Libanius was from Antioch. After studying all that could be studied in his native city, he begged his mother to let him go to Athens. He left and became a famous philosopher. He led the most important school of rhetoric in Constantinople. Then he was expelled from this city. He reopened his school in Nicomedia. After some time he was also expelled from Nicomedia. Here he is now back in his hometown - expelled and famous. He also opened a school of philosophy in Antioch. As soon as the school opened, the students began to flow here from all corners of the earth. Libanius was the most famous magister of that time.

Like all mothers, Antuza only wanted to entrust her son to the best school in the world. She now had this school in her own city, in Antioch. What fame Libanius enjoyed we can see from certain letters of his contemporaries. Emperor Julian wrote to him: "Yesterday before dinner I read almost all of your speech and, immediately after dinner, I finished the rest of my reading in one breath. Happy is the man who can speak and, even more, think like this. What elegance! What thoughts! What finesse! What division! What argumentation! What order! What movements! What diction! What harmony! What whole!". (*Lettres 14 a Libanius - Euvres completes de l'empereur Julien, Plon, Paris, 1863, page 367*)

The letter is signed by Flavius Claudius Julianus, emperor of the Romans. Not only the emperor, but also the saints themselves admired the pagan philosopher Libanius.

Among his passionate admirers was Saint Basil the Great, the colleague of the philosopher emperor exiled to Athens.

The fact that Libanius was a militant pagan and not a staunch enemy of Christianity, did not prevent Basil the Great, the future holy bishop, from admiring him. Even less could he prevent Antuza, who wanted to give her son a brilliant education. She therefore sent John to the school of Libanius. Nowhere could he learn as well as at the school of this great master of rhetoric.

In the 4th century, rhetoric was considered the mother of all sciences.

Addressing the pagans, Saint Gregory of Nazianzus said: "I leave you all riches, birth, glory, authority, and all earthly goods here, whose charms fade like a dream; but I retain eloquence. And I do not regret the toils, the journeys by sea and land that I undertook to conquer it." (*Saint Gregory of Nazians, Oper. Vol 1, M. Villemain, Teableau de l'eloquence chretienne au 4 siecle, Pairs, 1870, page 106*)

Antuza asked the bishop of Antioch if it was appropriate for a Christian woman to send her child to study with a pagan philosopher and an enemy of Christianity. No doubt the bishop advised Antuza to send John to Libanius. The bishops of that time sent future preachers to learn the art of speaking from Libanius. John Golden Mouth became, therefore, Libanius's student and in a short time he became the best. There is a letter of Libanius to John. The great philosopher writes to the future saint:

"I received your elegant and magnificent speech. I gave it to be read by men experienced in eloquence, and of remarkable skill in composing oratorical works. There was not one who did not show his enthusiasm by stomping, shouting, and by all the spontaneous movements that betray astonishment and admiration. I was the more proud because in this speech you showed both the laws and the model of eloquence. You are blessed that you knew how to create such a monument to the praise of the emperors, the father and the sons, who could meet a panegyrist (a person who praises someone excessively) like you" (*Cf. L'Abbe Rochet, Histoire de Saint Jean Bouche d'Or, vol 1, page 18*).

The biographers of the saint claimed that this letter was addressed to another John. These biographers wrote long after the canonization of John the Baptist. Usually these biographers were pious people who removed from the saint's biography everything that had a profane character. This speech, for the glory of the emperor and his two sons, was a profane one. But at the time he wrote it, John Golden Mouth was a student of Libanius. He was not yet a saint. Then he became a lawyer and enrolled in the bar in Antioch; he quickly became famous. We know almost nothing about this glory as a lawyer and secular orator.

After canonization, the biography of any saint is subjected to severe research; everything that is not related to holiness is removed from it. The life of John Golden Mouth, lawyer from beautiful Antioch, had nothing holy. The biographers, therefore, removed this part, as it was usually done with regard to the secular aspects of the life of any saint.

Flavius Claudius Julianus. The exam.

John Goldenmouth became one of Libanius's best friends. He was so appreciated as an orator that Libanius set up the project to designate him as his successor at the head of the rhetorical school in Antioch. But something happened then, that led John Goldenmouth to pursue the life of a saint instead of succeeding Libanius.

It was a crucial event in his life. In June 362, the emperor of Rome, named Flavius Claudius Julianus, and who is known in history as Julian the Apostate, died in Antioch.

Emperor Julian was accompanied by the historian Ammianus Marcellinus and a group of philosophers. The general staff of this emperor was composed preferably of philosophers, and not of generals. Julian's first visit to Antioch was made for Libanius, who had been his teacher. At Libanius, the emperor undoubtedly got to know the rhetorician's friends as well.

Emperor Julian valued nothing more than the company of philosophers. At the moment of his death, he banished the courtesans and soldiers from his tent and was left alone with the philosophers. He knew he only had a few minutes left on this earth. Julian spent that time discussing philosophy.

"There then took place," says the chronicler Ammianus Marcellinus in book 35 with 5, "a serious discussion with the philosophers Maximus and Priscus about the soul and about the transcendence of its nature. But his wound reopened and the swelling of the arteries making it difficult for him to breathe required fresh water, which he drank. After which he gave his soul without agony, towards midnight, in the 31st year of his life".

It is not common for the dying to spend their last moments of life discussing metaphysics. But that was Julian's nature and he was like that all his life.

The moment he appeared in Antioch, dressed not in the purple of the Roman emperors, but in an old toga like that of Libanius, with unkempt hair and beard, like Libanius, he aroused sincere admiration. The emperor walked and frequented simple people who were philosophers. In his capacity as Libanius's first student, John Goldenmouth inevitably became at that time one of Julian's closest friends.

Julian was a true philosopher. Ammianus Marcellinus writes: "He was of medium height, naturally smooth hair as if combed through it, his beard rough, bushy and sharp. His eyes were beautiful and the fire that shone in them revealed an alert mind."

Julian ate little, like an ascetic, slept little, despised pomp and luxury, as well as all earthly greatness. Julian lived in chastity like hermits, and his life's desire was to do as much good as possible. And with all that, Julian is one of the most denigrated emperors in all of universal history. Julian was an enemy of Christianity.

A sincere enemy of Christianity, he wanted the destruction of the Christian religion and the restoration of the pagan worship of the gods. It was the great dream of his life.

Julian had very serious reasons for hating Christianity with such a passion. There were human reasons. But even a great philosopher like Emper or Julian is only human and has human passions. When Julian was a child, Emperor Constans massacred his entire family. After massacring his parents and family, Constans exiled Julian. He exiled him to a monastery. He had him baptized. Then he entrusted him to the care of bishops, priests and deacons to raise him in the Christian religion. Then, by order of Emperor Constans, Julian became a cantor, a reader integrated into the lower Christian clergy. For Julian, the monastery was a place of exile. The one who kept him locked up here and who had ordered him to study the Scriptures was the murderer of his parents. The priests, bishops and deacons were his jailers.

A French historian from the last century wrote:

"A young prince full of imagination and enthusiasm suffers in exile the faithless tyranny of Constans, which has destroyed his whole family. Constans was a Christian. It was enough for Julian to be a polytheist. Constans destroyed the old cult of the empire. It was enough for Julian to want to restore it" (*M. Villemain, Tableau de l'eloquence chretienne au 4 siecle, Paris, 1870, page 510*).

Antioch, where Julian just arrived, was mostly Christian. This did not prevent the Antiochians from being enthusiastic about the manners of the philosopher emperor. But, after a while, the emperor's originality bored the Antiochians, who were refined people. They were bored by his sober manners, the absence of ceremonies, the refusal of any invitations. And they started to hate Julian. After which they began to make fun of the emperor and write epigrams on the walls. The emperor became the laughing matter of the city. And the fun was all the greater as Iulian did not order the police to arrest those who were tripping him.

"The mockers amused themselves by giving each other his signals: a small man with a goatee who walks with difficulty carrying his narrow chest and with large steps in the manner of Otus".

Even the pagans of Antioch mocked Julian's zeal in reviving the old worship of the gods. One day, when Julian went to the temple of Apollo in the vicinity of Antioch to perform a sacrifice, he found only one sacrificer and one sheep. The emperor was not angry at all. He gathered wood, lit the fire and sacrificed himself to Apollo. His over-zealousness in the matter of sacrifices caused the Antiochians to call him "the butcher".

"It was said that he reigned only to destroy the flocks of the universe and killed so many sheep and so many oxen on the altars that many peasants treated him as a cook and butcher" (*Ammianus Marcellinus*, Book 22 with 4).

While Julian was at Antioch, the temple of Apollo was set on fire. The huge statue of Apollo, of wood covered with gold, with arms and legs of ivory, with eyes of amethyst, with a crown of solid gold, beautifully chiselled, collapsed and was consumed by the flames.

At first, the emperor refrained from responding to the attacks. He refrained from using force against those who insulted him. Ordering the police and army to take retaliatory measures was the easiest thing for an emperor to do. All emperors act like this. But Julian did not draw his sword. He did not throw his enemies into prison. At least in the beginning. He answered them with the pen. He wrote against the Antiochians who attacked him a book entitled: Misopogon (http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Misopogon) or The Antiochian.

His enemies did not forgive Julian for not using violence. They did not forgive him anything. Even not having killed his enemies was considered a flaw. "He did not use violence against the Christians, says John Goldenmouth, because he did not want to strengthen the Church through martyrdom. If I take the path of violence, he thought, the Christians will fly to death like bees to the hive" (*Speech about the holy martyrs Iuventin and Maximin*).

Libanius, however, published a book in which he accused the Christians of burning down the temple of Apollo. Libanius was one of the very few representatives of the pagan world who had the courage to say what he thought. The others supported the emperor, but with much reserve. Ordinary people have the courage to commit, but only after they have convinced themselves that they are committing to the side of the one who will win.

Of all his contemporaries, John Goldenmouth is the one who wrote the cruelest words against Julian.

On June 26, 363, Emperor Julian, ruler of the Roman empire, died heroically at the head of his troops in a battle against the Persians. In his last moments, he spoke words full of wisdom:

"The time has come, my friends. Nature demands its tribute, perhaps a little too soon (he was only 31 years old), but like a faithful debtor I hasten to pay it without feeling - as one might think - neither sadness, nor regret. Philosophy has taught me to recognize the superiority of the soul over the body, and changing my condition for a better one, I must be happy rather than sad".

The death of emperor Julian had a crucial importance for the life of John Goldenmouth. Julian was the last emperor to try to restore the old worship of the false gods. His death in full youth was trumpeted by Christians as a heavenly punishment on those who fought against true philosophy, that is, against Christianity. The crowd of pagans was seized with fear. They came to the gates of the Christian churches and asked to be received.

The school of Libanius began to empty. Libanius himself saw that all was lost. He wanted to kill himself. He could not conceive of towns and villages without statues of spring gods, without white marble statues of forest gods, without temples. The old philosopher was left alone. His disciples were now in the Christian churches. He was almost alone at Julian's funeral to whom he gave the eulogy (*public praising speech*).

Emperor Julian was one of his last faithful pupils. All the others left him.

In the year 367, four years after the death of Julian, John the Golden Mouth becomes a reader in the church of Antioch. From now on, he begins his training to become an athlete of Christ, to become a champion among athletes and, finally, a saint.

Chapter 2

Receiving Baptism. God's friends.

Accompanied by Antuza, his mother, John Goldenmouth presented at the gate of the church in Antioch and was baptized. It may seem curious that John, the son of the pious Antuza, waited until he was 20 years old to be baptized. In the first centuries of Christianity, people were baptized very late.

Without any regret, John Goldenmouth turned his back on Libanius and the pagan world. He was not the only one who had done so. Everyone in Antioch did the same. Paganism had died with the emperor Julian. The temples were destroyed. Statues of gods and goddesses were thrown from their plinths and broken. The books of pagan philosophers and poets were burned: Plato, Aristotle, Homer, burned!

Ancient philosophy was, according to John Goldenmouth, "a madeup prostitute, without natural beauty". The Christian faith was recognized as the true philosophy. "Christianity made philosophers from the simple and uncultivated" (*Homily to the 1 Corinthians*).

It is true that Socrates had drunk hemlock. The Christians said: "He, who drank the hemlock, despised death, but our religion brings forth millions who have done the same. This Plato who spoke so much nonsense was silent, while the apostle speaks not only to his relatives, but also to the Parthians, the Elamites, to the Indians, to all the peoples of the world".

Along with the collapse of the old beliefs, temples and statues, the Roman empire was also collapsing. The empire did not collapse because the gods were destroyed and the books of the philosophers were burned. It was also an earthly thing that had to die one day or another.

The empire was extremely rotten inside. And from the outside it was besieged by barbarians. And while the empire was sinking like a ship, the world and especially the youth and the masses were looking for salvation.

The young and the masses wanted to live and this time they found salvation in the Church. Conversions to Christianity took place daily by the thousands, in compact masses.

Libanius loved John Chrysostom and suffered to see himself abandoned by his most beloved pupil. Moreover, Libanius was able to rise above his pagan condition and admire certain aspects of Christianity.

"One day", writes John Chrysostom, "my master praised my mother in public, saying: "Oh! what women Christians have". Another time when he was asked who would succeed him as director of his school of rhetoric, Libanius answered: "John, if the Christians had not stolen him from me!".

Libanius never ceased to admire and love John Chrysostom even when he abandoned him and went to the christian side. Just as he never stopped admiring and loving Basil the Great, when he also left him for the christians. He continued to be the friend of Saint Gregory of Nazianz even when he became a christian. He even congratulated Saint Basil the Great when he embraced the new faith and thus became "God's friend".

"You were still only a young man and I already honored you because of the seriousness of your behavior, worthy of the wisdom of the elderly" Libanius wrote to Saint Basil. "Now, knowing that you have returned to your country, I said to myself: Will he devote himself to law? Will he prefer education? Here I am told that you have chosen a better path and you seek to become God's friend rather than to earn money. I congratulate the Cappadocians and you: you because you have chosen such a beautiful path; them because they have such a great man as a compatriot. Signed: Libanius" (*Saint Basil the Great, Epistola 143, cf. Abbe Martin, Saint Jean Chrysostome, Paris, 1860, vol 1, page 49*).

John Chrysostom answers Libanius in caustic terms. He called Libanius "my master, the most superstitious of men" for the reason that Libanius did not embrace "true philosophy" either.

Bishop Meletie

After Libanius, John Chrysostom chose another master. He became the disciple of the one whom all the Antiochians called as being their father and whom they revered as a saint. He was Armenian and was born in Melitene, a small town in Armenia Minor. His name was Meletius and he was bishop of Antioch. He was the head of the Church founded by the apostles themselves. Theodore calls him Meletius the Great. Throughout his life as a bishop, he suffered three exiles. Not only christians, but even jews and pagans considered him a saint and honored him. "Holiness shone on his face. His face was a sermon," says John Chrysostom.

Another of his contemporary, a future saint, the poet Gregory of Nazianz writes about Meletius: "A man without craft, with simple manners, full of God, bearing in his heart the august (impressive, high) calm of his features."

Meletie was part of that category of people who seem to have peace in every pore of their being and whose mere presence stills the most terrible storm. John Chrysostom describes these happy people, who have a peaceful soul like that of Meletius, as follows: "A red-hot iron thrown into water cools more slowly than an irascible heart in contact with a peaceful soul".

Saint Basil the Great also had boundless admiration for Meletius, John Chrysostom's new master.

He writes to him: "If your piety knew the joy you give me by writing to me, you wouldn't have missed, I am sure, even an opportunity to do it. Don't you know what is the reward of heaven reserved for those who comfort in sorrows? But here everything is a prey to pain and the only deviation from our evils is your way of thinking. Therefore, when I receive one of your letters, I first look to see if it is long and I like it all the more because it contains more many lines. I am happy while I read it. As soon as it's over, I return to my sadness. If through your prayers I shouldn't end my earthly journey without receiving from you the teaching of salvation, I would count it (the letter) as a great good and proof of God's goodness.

John Chrysostom enrolled in the bishop's Meletius school with all the passion of his age. Moreover, all the citizens of Antioch were attached to him.

John Chrysostom writes about Meletius: "He had barely entered Antioch, that each of you gave his name to his children, thinking that in this way they were introducing the saint himself into his house. The name Meletius was like the light of a lighthouse, a call to piety. It resounded everywhere in the public squares, in the fields, along the roads, his face adorned the jewels of the rings, the cups, the walls of the apartments".

John Chrysostom also describes Meletius's retun to Antioch: "He was received in Antioch with great joy. The whole city went to meet him. Some kissed his hands, others his feet. Those whom the crowd prevented from approaching, considered themselves happy to hear his voice or see his face."

John Chrysostom was the son of Antuza, one of the most prominent parishioners of Meletius's diocese (episcopate). Antuza was part of the staff of rich and pious widows who usually accompanied priests and bishops. She therefore introduced her son to Meletius. The bishop took Antuza's son under his protection and entrusted him to the most learned theology professor in Antioch: Diodor.

Diodor. Apostle Pavel.

Diodor, John Chrysostom's new teacher, would later become bishop of Tarsus. A few fragmentary commentaries on the Scriptures remain from him.

Diodor was a scholar who interpreted the Scriptures according to the tradition of the school of Antioch. That is, in a predominantly historical and literal sense. Antiochian theologians were not mystics. They were guided by the letter of the Gospel that they read as it was written. For John Chrysostom, this theological method was extremely useful. John Chrysostom learned from Diodor to patiently read every word, every letter, as if under a magnifying glass, without leaving anything out. This habit of reading, made John Chrysostom one of the best connoisseurs of the Bible. It can be seen from the homilies he delivered later that he knew the Scriptures almost by heart.

While he was Diodor's student, John Chrysostom specified his future plans. During his theological studies he also chose his own path. He wanted to become a saint like Paul. His admiration for Paul was boundless: "The heart of Paul, he wrote, is the heart of Christ. Let us imitate Him, my brothers, as he himself (Paul) did."

In his room he always had an icon of Paul. Even if he didn't manage to achieve on earth everything that Pavel had achieved, John Chrysostom knew that they could be equal, because it's not the achievements, but the efforts that matter here. So he had to make the same efforts as Paul.

"Each one will be paid according to the effort he will give, says John Chrysostom, quoting Paul (1 Corinthians 3, 8), namely not according to the greatness of the deeds he will have done, but according to the greatness of the trials he will have endured. This is why, when Paul glorifies himself, he does it not so much for his deeds, but for his sufferings."

John is determined to sacrifice everything, and throws himself into battle with all his enthusiasm.

From that moment on, John lived only to realize his ideal. He studied day and night. He deepened the teaching of Jesus and sought to apply it literally to his life. He reduced his sleep, reduced his food. He severed all his ties with the world. But he knew that these exercises were only the beginning. He was aware of the insignificance of his achievements. But he also had patience. The world around him was beginning to cheer him. All of Antioch was talking about John Chrysostom, the young son of Antuza, who surpassed all his comrades in virtue. John Chrysostom tried to defend himself against glory, knowing that everything he had achieved until then was only the fruit of grace. He shouted loudly that he didn't deserve any attention. "Yesterday, I was still a child carried away by the maelstrom of profane concerns."

He says that he deserves no praise "because he frowned for a moment, because he put on a black cloak and covered his forehead with the false mask of modesty" (The book *About priesthood*).

John Chrysostom really wanted to become a saint. He knew the road was long. Those who praised him thought he had already reached the end. They were wrong. Sainthood had nothing to do with what he was at that time, but life always gives you something other than what you want. Antioch offered glory to John the Golden Mouth. He was, after Meletius, the most famous of the servants of the Church. He was famous as an orator. Famous for his virtue.

In a speech delivered later, his teacher Diodorus speaks of his student like this: "Let us therefore listen to this mouth that brings us its greeting. We can say about it what Moses said about the land of promise. Or what did Moses say? He called it a land flowing with milk and honey. Well, let's say the same thing about this mouth that drips honey and milk; let us therefore taste this milk, let us be satisfied with this honey, and for this, ending our speech here, let us bow our ear to the accents of the lyre and the trumpet. When I think of the sweetness of his words, I call his voice a lyre, but the force of his thoughts makes me call it a war trumpet, just like the ones the jews used to knock down the walls of Jericho".

Indeed, when John Chrysostom spoke, the auditor cried, applauded, gestured with emotion and pleasure. But John didn't want glory. He wanted holiness, an authentic holiness like that of Paul. He refused the praises of his teacher Diodorus with oriental elegance and courtesy. He says to Diodorus:

"The crown of praise that was addressed to me is too big for my head. This good father (Diodorus) did not stop, however, until he imposed it on me in some way. This is what kings often do: they take their crowns and place them on the heads of their children, but when they realize that in fact the royal crown does not sit well on these children's heads, they are satisfied that they made them wear it even in play, they take it back and places it again on their heads. Well, since my teacher Diodorus puts on my head the crown that suits him and does not want to take it back, allow me to lift it from an unworthy forehead and place it again on one that deserves it" (*Speech in honor of Diodorus from Tars*).

John Chrysostom had become the favourite of the auditors. And because in Antioch his glory grew more and more, and it was an obstacle on his way to holiness, he decided to leave his native city.

The kingdom of monks

John Chrysostom's plan to become a saint wasn't something new. He wasn't the only young man in Antioch who wanted this.

At that time in Antioch it was a diverse fact to hear it being said in the morning that a merchant, a magistrate, an official or a lady from high society left everything during the night to go into the unknown, into the brain of the mountains or into the sandy desert in order to become a saint. The world was used to such departures.

John Chrysostom was also tempted to leave everything and go. He decided not to go alone. You always embark on great adventures together with a comrade. The one with whom Ioan Gura de Aur wanted to leave, to becomea saint, had also studied at Diodorus' school of theology. His name was Basil. History has failed to identify him. It is possible that this Basil also became a saint, but he is not in the calendar. He probably became a saint somewhere on a mountaintop or in the Arabian desert. The calendar knows that there are thousands upon thousands of unidentified saints, venerated in churches as unknown soldiers fallen on the field of honor are venerated in national history.

John told how the preparations for leaving for the great adventure took place: the conquest of holiness. „Basil kept begging me to join him, let's run away together and go on an adventure and, far from any parental roof, let's choose a common home" (*About Priesthood*).

This flight and this departure to the unknown was the shortest road leading to holiness. At least that's what the people of those times thought. Basil the Great, the saint who had the organizational genius of a Roman governor, also declares that running away from the world is the only way that leads to God:

„So I read the Gospel and noticed that there is no better way to reach perfection than to sell your goods, to share with those of our brothers who are poor, to free yourself from all the cares of this life, so that the soul is not disturbed by any attachment to present things".

John and Basil decided, therefore, to separate from the world. They planned to forget the past, affections, interests, pleasures; to make a void around them, to keep their minds free like a wax tablet from which everything has been erased. After leaving the world and leaving for the desert, extraordinary things could be achieved.

First of all, human conditions could be overcome. In the 4th century, sensational stories were told about the performances of these loners. Youth in particular cannot resist the temptation to overcome the human condition, to become a saint, to perform miracles. John wrote about the ascetics and their life, with ardent admiration: „In the desert of Egypt one could see choirs of angels with human faces, crowds of martyrs, communities of virgins; the sky with the varied choir of stars shone less than the desert of Egypt where the hermitage cells of the monks multiplied" (*Homily on Matthew's gospel*).

Candidates for sainthood from Alexandria were leaving for the lower Nile desert. Those from Jerusalem fled to the Arabian desert. Those from Antioch went to the Taurus Mountains of Cappadocia and Armenia, or ended up in the desert regions surrounding the Black Sea.

John wrote: „To flee to a monastery, means to flee from earth to heaven”.

John and Basil were aware of the extraordinary achievements of the Desert Fathers. Everyone knew them. The saints could do everything. To become a saint was to achieve, with God's help, the impossible.

For example, an ascetic named Cesarion had managed to live in the snow without being cold. A few tens of kilometers from Antioch, the ascetic Symeon the Stylite lived for 40 years at the top of a column. For a perfect ascetic, the impossible was common currency. Human nature was outgrown.

A true ascetic could cross the Nile on the back of a crocodile. „It was said that the hermit Hilarion, arriving one Sunday in a community on the banks of the Nile, was surprised that the Holy Liturgy was not being celebrated. He was told that it was because the priest, who usually serves, lives on the other side of the river, and now you couldn't cross the water because of a crocodile that haunts the ford. <If it's just that, says the hermit, I'll go look for him>. He approached the river and made a gesture with his hand, and then the fearsome animal was seen coming out of the water and coming to offer its back to the hermit to carry him to the other side of the river. Once there, Hilarion could not convince the priest, who was a holy Kynovite, to come with him on the same path” (*Quoted from A. Broglie, L'Eglise et l'Empire au 4 siecle, vol 5, Paris, 1866, page 163*).

It was said at that time, everywhere, that the saints of the desert could live without sleeping; that they could live without eating, that they felt neither cold nor fatigue. Palladius, the biographer of John Chrysostom, who also lived in the desert, narrates countless facts from which it appears that the lonely saints often surpassed the human condition.

According to the conception of John Chrysostom, the life of a hermit was the highest step a man could climb. He wrote a study entitled "Parallel between a king and a monk". The glory of being a monk is incomparably greater than that of being an emperor.

„Just as a spectator sees from the height of the rock, which dominates the sea, the sailors battered by the storm like prisoners, swallowed by the waves or crushed by the rocks, so the man enlisted in the service of Christ escapes the swirling waves of life and stands safely on the rocks".

„Everything is sublime in the life of monks and hermits", John Chrysostom said at that time:

„Close to the springs, in absolute silence and deep solitude, belonging to God above all, the monk feels like a winged soul, light, purer than the clearest air. The poor monastic cells gathered together on the mountain make up a camp much more beautiful than the emperor's".

It even seems that Basil wanted to immediately put into practice the plan of fleeing into the desert.

„I had many friends, writes John Chrysostom, I had true friends, sincere friends, who knew the laws of friendship and knew how to practice them, but among these many friends there was one whose affection for me was unique, and between her and the other friends there is as much distance as there was between my friends and people who were nothing to me. We were never separated. We studied together, we had the same teachers. The same emulation and the same ferocity for work had awakened in us the same ambitions" (*About Priesthood*).

The big decision: the love

Basil and John have finished all their preparations. They were about to leave the world and embark on the great adventure. But at the last minute something happened, a thing that might seem unimportant in comparison with something so high an ideal. This little thing made all the plans fall apart at once: Antuza, John's mother, began to cry. She was undoubtedly a good Christian, but it's hard for a mother to let her son go into the depths of the desert. And Antuza did what was normal for a mother: she started crying and begging her son to stay by her side. It is believed that the older sister of John was no longer alive. Antuza only had John and she wanted to keep him by her side through tears.

„Our plan was about to be realized, writes John, but as soon as my beloved mother sensed my plan to leave, she took me, grabbed me by the hand and led me to her room. Then she sat next to me on the same bed where I saw the light of day and there, bursting into tears, she added even more tender words to the sobs that were tearing my heart: "Wait for my departure from this world. Maybe it will soon take place. At my age you don't expect anything other than death. After you have laid me, once more, with your father's, go as far as you will, soar on the sea of your choice. But while your mother still breathes, do not refuse to stay with her, don't, perhaps, anger God, unnecessarily and without reason plunging a mother who has done you no harm into so many evils... if you can say that I want to burden you with the cares of life... trample on the laws of nature or simple decency, take no account of anything and run away from me like an enemy who is running for you”. (*About Priesthood*)

In order to achieve Christian purity, he had to withdraw outside the world. This retreat is the shortest way to holiness, that's for sure. But he who tramples on a human when he retires from the world, closes his path to holiness forever. However, no one can become holy by trampling over people. Even over one person.

The first step towards holiness is the love of people, and especially the love of all people. He who doesn't fully love every human being, cannot reach even the first step of Christian virtue.

John knew (and will say it later) that a soul has a value equal to, or even greater than, that of countless cities and empires (*First advice to Teodor, after his fall*).

Breaking Antuza's heart, John would never have appeared in the calendar. He made the first big decision that was to lead him to God. He stayed with his mother.

Asceticism, solitude, prayer, fasting, nothing can equal the gesture of love towards the woman with gray hair who was crying and begging him not to leave. John writes that he broke up with Vasile and let him go alone. "I violated my friendship," he writes.

Vasile left without John, who remained under the mother's roof. „My friend has already surpassed me in his race to the heights. The training he acquired took him far away from me, disappearing quickly, immediately, from my life, into the heights”.

The desert under the maternal roof

It was certainly John first step towards sainthood. But the road to holiness is longer than the road to the stars. John didn't go with Basil in the desert. But if he didn't go in the desert, he brought the desert under the maternal roof. He really brought it. Antuza asked him only one thing: not to leave as long as she is alive. He listened. He stayed at home. But, from that day on, he lived the same life in Antuza's house as he would've lived in the desert.

He threw the bed out of his room. He threw away the furniture. He gave up being served by his mother's servants. He prepared himself everything he needed, like the hermits in the heart of the desert. He reduced his sleep as much as possible. John could no longer see anyone. He stopped going out and stopped receiving anything from others, he prepared his food - boiled vegetables - once a day. The time was devoted to study and prayer. He sought - as desert hermits do - to control his passions, his instincts. He lived in absolute solitude. He could only see the ceiling and the bare walls of his room.

„No doubt my passions are not quenched, but it is easier for me to fight them... As well-fed wild animals easily put down those who attack them, especially if the prey is neither strong nor able, but if they are exhausted by hunger, their rage subsides and their powers are largely extinguished: so he who weakens the passions of the soul, subjects them to the yoke of reason... Closed in my solitude, I had to make efforts to tame them. But, by the grace of God, I tame them and I only hear their distant howls. That's why I guard my room and keep it closed for any visitor” (*About Priesthood*).

Although he lived in his native house as if in a desert, John confesses to us who his greatest enemies are: "My soul is weak. It cannot bear in moderation neither insults nor praise." He didn't have the opportunity to bear the insults, but the greatest danger were the praises.

The more John Golden Mouth isolated himself, the more his glory increased in Antioch. The city only talked about his wisdom, his virtue, his golden mouth and his genius. One day, the city that worshiped this lonely young man who lived in the middle of Antioch with more austerity than the hermits of the desert, entered his room and wanted to take him out of his solitude and make him a bishop.

At that time, Basil must have undoubtedly found himself in some monastery around Antioch. He was summoned to Antioch and told that John and him would be made bishops in the Church founded by the apostles.

John tried to dodge. The future saint believed in the sublime value of the priesthood, but he didn't believe that he had reached a perfect state that would make him worthy to become a priest. He was convinced that he still had to make efforts to achieve personal perfection. He wanted to buy time.

The Antiochians didn't accept his argument. John tried other arguments. He replied that he was too young and that the Antiochians had to choose a bishop who was an old man.

„People whose age and virtue demand respect are excluded from the election, and behold, some children who yesterday were still carried away by the whirlwind of profane cares, because they furrowed their brows for a moment, put on a black cloak and covered their foreheads with a false mask of modesty, suddenly see themselves raised by their parents to this sublime dignity... Such people who, from childhood to old age, have spent all their existence in the making of holy things, they see themselves always subject to the rigorous duty of obedience, while the commanding authority is in the hands of their children who do not even know the existence of the holy laws that govern the obligations of the priesthood" (*About Priesthood*).

Through this refusal to become a bishop, John took the second step towards sainthood. The first step was love, the second was seriousness. The relationship between man and God is the most serious act that a human can perform on earth. Like any serious act, this one also requires seriousness. Priesthood implies depth, maturity, solemnity. At his age, John didn't consider himself sufficiently prepared.

But Antioch wanted John to become bishop at any cost. The religious leaders of the city agreed with John's friends. The entire population insisted that he become a bishop together with Basil. Seeing that he couldn't persist in his refusal, John accepted. But on the day he was to be enthroned, he disappeared without a trace. Without saying anything to anyone. He confessed it himself: „Shortly after the arrival among us of the bishop who was supposed to sanctify us, I hid from any search". Only Basil was enthroned: no one could find John.

He didn't want to become a bishop to please his citizens. He wanted to become a true athlete of Christ first. He first had to have the immense courage to disagree with his fellow citizens when it came to faith and God. John Chrysostom read Paul who said: „If I try to please people, I will no longer be a servant of Christ". (*Galateni 10, 1*).

This would be John's motto throughout his entire earthly life: he wouldn't sacrifice God to please people.

Later, Basil came to look for him. He tried to address some reproaches to him. „As soon as he learned of my runaway, he fell into deep sorrow... he came to find me, sat down by my side, wanted to say a few words and, despite his efforts, couldn't explain to me the hurt he had suffered. He strove to speak, but the pain stopped the words on his lips".

Basil was John's best friend. But John couldn't accept the priesthood just to please his best friend. He didn't want to please his friends. He only wanted to be Christ's servant and athlete.

With this courageous decision, he left Antioch, which respected him. This time, John went to the desert. It was the year 375. It seems that his mother was no longer in this world. He could, therefore, now follow his path to perfection. And this path went through the desert, through asceticism, through all the terrible experiences that a man must endure in order to rise above his human condition and get closer to God.

Chapter 3

The way of the monastery

Of all the assets collected by General Secundus and administered with such skill by Antuza, John kept nothing. He first retired to a monastery. His only wealth was "a coat, a robe and a mat to sleep on." Giving up on all earthly goods was for him one of the most insignificant. John had never had the desire to possess goods. Now everything had been distributed to the poor. He had devoted himself only to God.

Entering the monastery, he cut all connections with the world. His only brothers were the other monks. His ideal was to turn his gaze away from the external things and to have eyes only for God and eternity.

Never should a monk notice that one of the three things he has - coat, robe and mat - has been broken, lost, or stolen (*The rules of Saint Macarie*).

If a monk said that he no longer had mats to sleep on, it meant that he was still preoccupied with external things. These things were the responsibility of the monastery's treasurer. Only the treasurer had to notice if one of the brothers didn't have a coat. Even the images of the past had to be erased from memory. Sleep lasted only a few hours. The awakening took place immediately after midnight.

The future athlete of Christ was never allowed to go out alone. He was not allowed to look at a woman's face, not even a woman's garment. Saint Ieronim, who lived in the desert near Antioch, writes: "I say nothing about my food, nor about my drink: in this desert, even sick monks hardly dare to drink fresh water. Eating cooked food is considered intemperance" (*Saint Ieronim, Letter 22 to Eustochium*).

He had no right to say that he didn't commit the mistake for which he is being reprimanded. Even if he didn't actually commit it, he should always ask for forgiveness with sincere humility. Physical labor was compulsory. But this physical work was interrupted at least six times a day by common prayers, so that the inner atmosphere would not suffer any interruption.

The study of the Scriptures took place continuously. Detachment from the material world, from one's own body, was pushed to the point that the monk never had to look at his body when taking a bath, because even his own body was part of the external world "of the seen", ephemeral, which he had to renounce.

For 4 years, John lived completely detached from the world and from hismself. During this time, he composed an apology for the monastic life in which he advised parents to never prevent their children from embracing the life of hermits. Numerous parents were united to carry out a violent campaign against the hermits.

In his written works: *Advice to Teodor after his fall*, *Against enemies of monastic life*, *Comparison between a king and a monk*, *Advice to Stragirius*, John becomes the lawyer of the monks. After 4 years, however, John, who had reached a new stage in his life of self-detachment, continued to search for perfection. He left the monastery and retired, alone, in a cave.

Palladius writes: "John retired alone to a cave; he remained here for three times eight months, depriving himself of sleep almost without ceasing, thoroughly studying the testament of Christ. During these two years, he didn't sleep day, nor night."

This life of total solitude, of absolute self-detachment, is one of John's efforts. It's a terrible effort that only long-trained athletes can do. The road to conquer holiness through solitude, fasting, prayer and virtue lasted two years. After these two years, John returned to the world. He's back, but completely transformed.

Returnign to the world

Palladius writes that the John left his cave and returned to the world because his legs were paralyzed.

One day, John woke up in the cave and was paralyzed. He couldn't move anymore. All his life he suffered from the infirmities contracted during his stay in the cave. But the future saint left his cave and returned to Antioch - after six years of absence.

He had reached a high level of perfection in the desert. However, there was still a long way to go between this individual perfection and holiness. And he had to make this journey in the world, not in the desert. The desert, the asceticism, the cave and the six years of mortifications were only a stage.

The love for others

John returned to Antioch paralyzed, with his stomach completely destroyed by fasting. He left the impression that he had no body or blood left. "An emaciated body whose bones barely held together" (*Saint Ieronim, Letter 22*). He returned from the desert with absolute independence and detachment in regard to things seen and with an infinite love for God and for his human brothers. All the life that John would live on earth would be marked by the virtues acquired during the six years in the desert. They were sublime virtues, but insufficient. John says it verbatim: "Stop talking to me about steep mountains, valleys full of bushes, chasms, inaccessible solitudes. All these things alone are not enough to dispel the restlessness of the soul. For this we need the flame that Christ kindled in Paul's heart."

The saint's asceticism and virtue are in vain if they are not put at the service of people. "What characterizes the one who loves Christ is the fact that he cares about the salvation of his brothers."

"All the monks who retreated to the tops of the mountains to crucify themselves in a thousand ways, should listen to these words. Let them help those at the head of the Churches to the extent of their power, encourage them with their prayers, with their sympathy, with their love. Let them know well that if, despite the distance, they do not support those who are in dangers and in so many troubles, their life remains truncated and their wisdom mutilated".

Coming from the mouth of a saint, these last words are earth-shattering. He warns these people who have sacrificed everything for God against a wasted life and a mutilated wisdom. Coming from a man who lived in the desert all the mortifications to acquire holiness, this accusation is of extreme gravity. But John had discovered the ecclesial dimension of Christianity. He had acquired supreme personal virtue. Another horizon, a new path was opening up in front of him.

Progress in collective life

John ignored the existence of the Roman empire. The empire, however, didn't ignore John. The empire didn't ignore any hermit, even in the depths of the caves. It is true that soldiers and officials of the empire no longer entered the border provinces. There were the barbarians. But the empire had noticed that where the soldiers and agents of the Roman treasury retreated, the monks seemed to remain.

The ascetics weren't afraid of lions, panthers or barbarians. The Roman Empire wanted to perpetuate its continuity in the territories lost by the army and officials, if only through these elements who were the lonely Christians and ascetics who recognized only God.

The consular official Ambrose from Milan was also made a bishop. But the empire failed to make him an official! A clerk in a bishop's robe was more obeyed than a clerk with a governor's emblem, especially in territories where the only Roman citizens were Christians. The imperial propaganda translated into Christian language was similar to that dedicated to John the Golden Mouth. Before him, it had been used with the greatest success by Saint Basil the Great.

These revered servants were of good faith. It is certain that they had reached this social conception of Christianity only because of their virtue. But imperial propaganda also plays an extremely important role. The servants admit that, at certain points, the interests of the empire and the Church coincide. To a certain extent, the empire, with its new political orientations, is also responsible for the return of John the Golden Mouth from his cave among the people, to Antioch.

Saint Basil the Great writes, in *Monk's rules*:

„No one is enough for himself, even only for the needs of the body, and we still need each other for the necessities of life. God, Who created us, wanted us to need each other, so that we remain connected to each other. Moreover, the love of Christ doesn't allow a man to think only of himself. But the one who lives completely alone has no other goal than his own salvation, which is clearly contrary to the law of love that the apostles followed when they sought to do all things to all in order to save as many as possible...

Finally, in such a retreat the hermit will not easily recognize his faults, having no one to warn him and bring him a fraternal correction. Indeed, even from an enemy, reproof makes a generous man want to correct himself, and a sincere friend boldly rebukes the faults he sees in his friend. Or in absolute solitude you don't have such a friend... That's why they say: Woe to the lonely, because if he falls he has no one to pick him up.

In the ascetic life there are other shortcomings, and the biggest one is that the lonely man indulges in himself. Since no one is present to judge the work that is done in him, he believes that he has reached the perfection of all the commandments. Moreover, not finding in which to exercise his virtue, since he has removed from him the matter and occasion of all the commandments of God, he knows neither what he still lacks, nor the progress he has made. How will the one, who finds no one to humble himself, show his humility? And what occasion will he have to be compassionate, who sees no one suffering? How will he exercise his patience when no one opposes his will? When he wanted to set the model of perfection, love and humility, the Lord girded his waist and washed the feet of his disciples. But you, hermits, whose feet will you wash and whose servants will you become? How are you going to be the last, if you are alone?**”** (*Saint Basil the Great, The big rules*).

And Saint Basil adds: „Public life is the true arena of perfection, the true path of progress, the true exercise of virtue, the true practice of God's law”.

Deacon. Social assistance

Committed to this new path, John dedicated himself, starting in 381, to the Christian society. He became a deacon. His mission was to help the poor. In addition to the Church in Antioch, there was this kind of social assistance, led by John. He devoted himself to this work with all his passion as an athlete of Christ, just as he had devoted himself to solitude a few years before. For him it was hard work and apparently far away from the work of a priest. John writes:

„Because of your cruelty, the Church is full of fields, rented houses, wagons, horses, mules. Fearing that they will see widows, orphans and maidens dying of hunger, your bishops were forced to accumulate goods. And now we no longer dare to open our mouths, the Church not being better than the people of the world. Our bishops are more overwhelmed by material worries than the intendants, economies and the merchants, though they should deal only with your souls. All day they calculate and levy taxes. Instead of devoting themselves to prayer and learning, we spend our time in debating the prices with the merchants of wine, wheat, and other goods".

He continued his struggle in the field of social assistance, as a servant of God, for five years. He also continued the theological work. During this time he wrote the treatises *About maidenhood, Dialogue about priesthood, Letter to a young widow*, and many others.

In 386, the bishop of Antioch, Flavian, the successor of Meletius, ordained him a priest. The athlete of Christ who had fought in Antioch, in the desert, in the cave, in the marketplace with the merchants, was now coming to serve Christ by fighting through the word as a preacher.

Chapter 4

Priest. Words of praise

On the day John Chrysostom was ordained a priest, all of Antioch came to church. For the Antiochians he was not only the son of Antuza. He was now an experienced athlete of Christ who had fought terrible battles. The traces of these struggles were visible in his entire being. Although only 40 years old, his hair was almost white and he had lost most of it. His body was small and very weak. Dressed in the only clothing he had, he weighed no more than 40 kilograms. He had realized the words of the Apostle: "Put to death the members of the earthly man." He had killed his body. It was commanded: "Cling to the things above, not to the earthly." For John, only heaven alone existed. The day he donned the priestly robe, John had an immense ideal.

With this intention, John climbed the pulpit for the first time: with the thought of fulfilling what is missing in the passion of Christ. Paul and John maintain that Jesus carried the cross for the salvation of people. If people do not receive salvation, Christ's sacrifice is ineffective. This is what Paul did when he said that he fulfilled in his body what was lacking in Christ's passion; with this intention, John ascended the pulpit of the church in Antioch. They both understood that Christ needed them so that His Passion would not lack anything.

Concretely, he wanted to convert all of Antioch to Christianity, until the last person and make every Christian live exactly as Jesus would have asked; then, going further, to gather in the Church all those outside of it. He knew that this achievement required the strength of a champion. He knew that he no longer had muscles, flesh, blood, that his body was collapsing at the slightest beat of wind. He knew he was small and broken. He himself says that the bee, one of the smallest flying insects, makes honey, which is the sweetest thing in the world. So he bravely climbed into the pulpit to be able to say: "What is lacking in the sufferings of Christ, I now fulfill for His body, which is the Church." (Coloseni 1, 24)

The crowd guesses the priest's boldness. The crowd knows that they will witness fights like they've never seen before in Antioch. That's why no one is absent from the church on the day of sanctification. Even the pagans are there!

At his first sermon, John is moved. „I now see this great city, this people so numerous, this amazing crowd turning their greedy eyes on my smallness, as if something remarkable should come out of my mouth" (*Homily for the day he was ordained a priest*).

Crowds have intuition. They know that they will witness extraordinary performances and for this reason they came to the consecration of John Golden Mouth. John also knew what was the weapon with which he had to fight and by which he would perish: the word.

On the day he was ordained, in the speech he gave as a priest, he delivered some words as an offering to the Lord. With the word he would fight and because of the words that came out of his golden mouth he would have to die: „Opening my mouth for the first time in a church, I proposed to dedicate to God the lever of my word, of this gift that comes to us from God."

He says that of all the offerings, God loves the offering of the word the most. Addressing the sinners who wanted to appease the wrath of God, the prophet Hosea advised them not to bring as a sacrifice whole herds of oxen, nor wheat barns, nor turtledoves, nor doves, nor anything similar. But what exactly? What does he say? Bring words of praise.

The way of the truth

The activity plan of priest John was to bring all people to Christianity and make them perfect Christians. He tells the believers: „I want you to become perfect. On earth, there's only one danger for man: sin".

He seeks, therefore, to save people from the danger of sin. The crowd in Antioch is excited by John's sermons. The crowd applaude, shout, cry, wave handkerchiefs... „I didn't do my duty for the pleasure of speaking and enjoying enthusiastic applause, but to bring the lost to the path of truth", John said.

As for sins: drunkenness, lying, theft, flirtation, pride and so many others, the Antiochians postpone the fulfillment of these good recommendations to combat them, until later.

Christianity, says Kierkegaard, is like radical therapy for a sick person. The patient is convinced of the effectiveness of this cure, but as long as he can move, as long as he can continue his life, he delays the heroic gesture of starting this therapy, postpones it for tomorrow.

The Antiochians were delirious listening to John's sermons and they were all determined to put his advice into practice, but not immediately, later. For the moment, they continued their lives with their little sins, determined to part with them in a more distant day, later.

John used to get exasperated countless times by seeing this crowd that listened to his sermons, standing for hours, but did not follow his advice. But John would see with his own eyes all the citizens of Antioch becoming Christians, down to the last one, following the Gospel to the letter.

„Indeed, some of the virtues are voluntary, others are due to circumstances" (*Paladie, Istoria lausiacă 15, 2*).

The circumstances that made the Antiochians true Christians, had their starting point on February 26, 387.

A new tax

John was not interested in the political atmosphere in which he lived. A saint is above history. The church and the saints have the same relationship with political realities as oil and water: they are in the same vessel, but the oil remains on top and the water at the bottom and does not mix at all. The church and politics do not mix, although living in the same space and in the same era they are contemporary with each other. Their natures are too different. It is ignored. From time to time, events arise that disturb the elements,that mix them so that for a while you can no longer tell which is water, which is oil. It's a murky mix.

A similar storm broke out at Antioch in 387 on February 26. John Chrysostom was a preacher. He fought like an athlete to save people from sin and make them virtuous. It was his only concern.

On February 26, official billboards announced the rise in taxes. John wasn't interested in that, he said: „Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar”, but now he was also obliged to deal with taxes. The problem was not simple.

At that time, the Roman Empire was ruled by Theodosius. History keeps a very good memory of him and calls him Theodosius the Great. It seems that he was about to turn 50 and was preparing grandiose festivities for this event. Festivities that cost money. It also celebrated the 10th anniversary of his accession to the throne. All festivities took place at the same time. This second event required even more lavish celebrations, that is, even more expensive. On this occasion, Theodosius promised each soldier in the imperial army a gift: 5 gold pieces.

This generosity towards the soldiers, who were mostly barbarians, was absolutely necessary, because the soldiers had revolted in different places of the empire.

To organize these celebrations and to offer gifts to each soldier, the emperor needed money. Although history called him "the great", Theodosius proceeded like all small emperors who need money: he created a new tax. This news arrived in Antioch, the city of John Chrysostom, on the 26th of February and produced great panic.

Hearing talk of a new tax, the demoralized population took to the streets; the women cried, the men lamented. A part of the population was already leaving, in order not to be caught by the tax agents. Another part of the citizens were packing their bags to leave the city. But most Antiochians were in the streets and were looking for a solution. They were looking for someone who would go and meet the emperor and beg him to exempt them from the terrible calamity that was this new tax.

But at that time, in the 4th century, paying a tax meant torture, dead, injured, children became orphans, women became widows, disabled people.

A writer of the time, Firmianus Lactantius, writes that "when collecting taxes, the fields were measured by clods of earth, the trunks of the vines were counted, the animals were recorded, the people were registered. All that was heard were the blows of the whips, cries of torture. The faithful slave was tortured against his master, the wife against her husband, the son against his father. In the absence of other witnesses, they were tortured against themselves. And when they gave in, convinced of the pain, they gave false assets statements... It was hardly reported to these first agents, that others were sent to find more and the tasks were always doubled, although they didn't find anything, but they added at random, so as not their job to appear useless" (*Firmianus Lactantius, cf. A. Rambaud, Histoire de la civilisation francaise, Paris, 1893, page 49*).

The people's plea

After they had taken to the streets to the last and lamented, the Antiochians decided to go en masse to the governor of Antioch and beg him to protect them from the emperor, so that they would be spared from this terrible misfortune.

The governor was a friend of the emperor. He was in Constantinople. The governor had to go meet the emperor and beg him on behalf of the Antiochians to exonerate them and not hand them over to the tax agents. The Antiochians hoped that the governor would accept their request. He wasn't a bad man.

From children who could barely walk to the elderly, all the Antiochians headed towards the governor's palace full of hope. Governors and public order officials are people whose sensitivity is reduced to a minimum. Their lack of sensitivity is a professional deformity that becomes a professional quality.

When the governor saw the crowd heading towards his palace, he ordered the gates to be locked. No one could convince the governor that the citizens came with peaceful intentions. After ordering the gates to be closed, the governor disappeared running almost naked up a service staircase. In the square, the crowd asked him to show himself, but he had disappeared from the palace.

Seeing that the governor didn't answer, the crowd went to the palace of bishop Flavian, the successor of Meletius, which was a friend of the emperor. He had received the bishop's vestments from the hands of Theodosius and was sent to Antioch against the will of the priests and believers. The people didn't love Flavian, but they were obliged to ask for help from someone who had access to the emperor. So the people went to the bishop and, from the street, called Flavian. But the bishop didn't appear either.

The people knew that, if the bishop didn't respond and defend them alongside the emperor, Antioch would have been exposed to a terrible misfortune. The crowd therefore forced the gate of the episcopal palace. They simply broke the gate. A broken gate is like a match that can set a whole city on fire by itself.

After forcing the gate, other angry citizens, seeing that their bishop was hiding at the very moment when the faithful needed him, demolished the building of the baths that was next to the episcopal palace and entered the place. Flavian was absent. When the crowd broke down the gate and demolished the walls, when they entered the palace, he was not there.

The awkward statue

Not finding the bishop, the crowd again headed towards the governor's palace. The gates were still locked. A few minutes before, the crowd had forced the gates of bishop Flavian. The crowd now knew from experience that they could enter through a locked gate. It was enough to break it. And the Antiochians broke down the gates of the governor's palace and entered, but the palace was empty. Neither the governor, nor any of the collaborators, who could have helped the Antiochians in these difficult moments, were here. All the halls of the palace were empty. The dramatic thing was that they were empty just at the moment when the crowd absolutely needed to find someone. But there were only walls, furniture. It was nothing more than a life-size statue of emperor Theodosius and his august family. There was no living thing. The crowd looked at the statue of the emperor. The people wanted to beg him to spare him from this calamity: the tax. But it was only his statue, not the emperor.

It was magnificent. Gold, silver, marble. But however beautiful and like the emperor it may have been, the statue could not be of any help to the Antiochians. And since it couldn't come to their aid, but remained there as a defiance, useless in front of the people, the crowd overthrew it. After they took it down from its plinth, the crowd broke it to pieces. What do we do with a useless object that we throw away because we find it when we are looking for something else.

After breaking the statue of the emperor and taking it into the street, as ridiculous as any statue taken down from its plinth and destroyed, the crowd also destroyed the others, which represented the deceased wife of the emperor and the two sons, Arcadius and Honorius. They tore them to pieces, all four of them, starting with the emperor.

All these events: the visit to the governor, the procession of the crowd to the episcopal palace, the destruction of the baths and the return to the governor's residence, where the imperial statues were broken, lasted altogether three hours. These three hours were enough for the governor to run up the stairs and return with numerous troops, police and army.

Under his leadership, the police and soldiers began the massacre. The crowd was now calm. But this was no longer important. Calm or in revolt, the population had to be massacred. It was legit. Everything the police does is legal and legitimate, always.

Consequences

The prefect of the city of Antioch was called Tisamen. Busy with the massacre, he didn't sleep at night. Troops were called from the neighboring forts and camps. They were brought from Syria, from everywhere. Antioch was besieged by its own army. Citizens were hunted in the streets. They were hunted in their own houses, in their gardens, everywhere. Men, women, children were arrested, killed, martyred. The tortures took place in public. The houses were set on fire. Prefect Tisamen was no more cruel than others. But the situation of Antioch was very serious. Insulting the statue of the emperor of Rome was the most heinous crime under the sun. That's how it was back then. However cruel Tisamen's measures against the population might have been, he risked being accused of weakness. Tisamen therefore ordered his soldiers to spare nothing, after which he sent a courier to Constantinople to ask for instructions as to whether he could leave a stone or a wall standing in Antioch, or whether he should destroy everything. For this was the punishment of those who mistreated an august statue.

The Antiochians knew what awaited them. The journey of the envoys to Constantinople and back took two weeks. The citizens who had not been killed during these two weeks were to be mutilated and killed after the arrival of the exceptional messengers bearing the order of extermination.

Prayers

While the Antiochians were breaking the imperial statues, John the Golden Mouth was preparing his sermon for the next day. When the prefect Tisamen ordered the massacre, John put aside his speech. It was no longer about the sermon for the next day. He spoke in all the churches of Antioch, in turn, not only on holidays, but almost every day, so that as many citizens as possible could hear him.

This time, three days passed without him opening his mouth. Three days without the saint appearing in the pulpit. In his homilies, John urged Christians to respect the evangelical virtues. It was his subject, his only subject.

The believers of Antioch were threatened at all hours of the day and night. Every citizen was waiting for his death. When threatened with death, man forgets everything. It's in the nature of things. John had said in a sermon: „Although people die as a rule since their appearance on earth, the uncertainty of the moment of death and the ugliness of death make people never get used to it. Every time a person dies, the event is so serious that it seems to be the first death that occurs”.

This event, which people couldn't get used to, this time threatened each of the five hundred thousand inhabitants of Antioch. Panic was general. Tisamen, like any official, did his job as a prefect. The manhunt has reached its peak. Because of this, since the day of the massacre John decided not to speak to the people. He loved people. Either people didn't want words or advice, they just wanted one thing: to get rid of the cruel horror of death. That's why John didn't give them speeches in all these days. He prayed for them. He tried to do something for them to free them from the terror in which they lived. He wanted to save the Antiochians from death.

The good shepherd lays down his life for his flock

To save the Antiochians, there was only one way: taming the emperor Theodosius. Only the emperor could stop the massacre. John Chrysostom asked his superior, bishop Flavian, to go to Constantinople. Flavian was the friend of Theodosius, his protégé. He was the most suitable person to convince Teodosie. John therefore asked him to go and obtain the pardon of the city and the inhabitants of Antioch.

John's plan was excellent and had every chance of success. But there was an obstacle to its realization: Bishop Flavian was old. Very old indeed. „His age reaches the ultimate limit of old age," writes John.

Flavian didn't even want to hear talk of such a thing. It was February, in the dead of winter. Old Flavian was sick as it's normal for a man "at the last limit of old age". On the other hand, Flavian had a sister who was also waiting to pass away from any day to the next, and who didn't want to let her brother be away from her any longer.

It was one of the hardest battles that John Chrysostom had in his life: to convince the old Flavian to go to Constantinople in the middle of winter. „The good shepherd lays down his life for his flock" (John 10, 11), said John Golden Mouth to the old man, preparing his luggage. Moreover, he prepares the speeches that Flavian was to read to the emperor. After which he gives precise instructions on how to act. John tells Flavian that he had no right to return without the act of pardoning the Antiochians being signed by the emperor. John had inserted Moses' phrase into his speech: „If you forgive their sins, send me back; if you refuse their forgiveness, put me to death with them" (Exodus 32, 32).

Flavian gave in to the insistence and promised to leave.

After a week of absence, John appeared again before the people.

„For two days," says John Chrysostom, „I have kept silence, like Job's friends. Now let me open my mouth and lament this common misfortune. Before nothing was brighter than our city; now nothing has become more bitter to us. The city is empty. As bees are driven from their hive by using smoke, so were the inhabitants of Antioch driven from their city by fear.

First, our city was shaken, and today the soul of its inhabitants. Antioch has been shaken from its foundations, and now each one of us is tottering in the depths of his heart. We have death before our eyes unceasingly, we live in continual terrors, we are more wretched than those who have long dwelt in hiding, suffering the unusual horrors of an unparalleled siege. For those who are besieged by enemies are not confined except within the walls of their city. For us, however, it's not without danger to appear even in the public space, each one remaining locked in his own house. And just as the besieged cannot venture outside the walls because of the enemies that watch over them all around, so many of our fellow-citizens cannot venture out of their houses, nor appear in public, lest they fall into the hands of men who on all sides harass the innocent as well as the guilty, lift them up from the midst of the agora, and drag them indiscriminately before the tribunals.

Free people confused with their slaves are somewhat like chained in their dwellings. Who is caught, taken and condemned today? For what reason and in what way? This is what they anxiously wondered about. They constantly inform themselves about this from those who they think they can safely ask. Death itself is less miserable than such a life. Lamenting every day the misfortune of others, they tremble terribly for themselves, their life is not at all preferable to death or, better said, they are already dead of fright.

One or two people can hardly be seen on the street with their heads bowed under the burden of sadness... The people have disappeared. Deprived of its inhabitants, our city is nothing more than a ruined soil, an arid land, the sight of which casts the soul into sorrow and mourning. Not only the earth, but also the air, the very shadow of the sun seems to me saddened by our misfortunes, covered with our sorrows, not because nature has changed, but because the eyes of the citizens of Antioch are constantly filled with tears. It would be said that our entire population has descended into the bosom of the earth. Its inhabitants resemble marble statues...".

„I hardly have the strength to open my mouth, he says, I hardly have the strength to move my tongue to make an articulate sound. Grief is a brake that keeps my lips still and prevents me from speaking."

"Give me your soul... Let us try to put it in God's hands. God cares more about our salvation than we do ourselves, because He is our Creator„ (The *2nd homily to the people of Antioch*).

The plan. Hope

The next day, John Golden Mouth spoke again to the people. This time he announced the great news: bishop Flavian was about to leave for Constantinople to plead with the emperor and save the Antiochians from extermination. To give them courage, he described Flavian's journey. „An old man, he took to the road like a youth, and his courage gives him wings" (*Third homily to the people of Antioch*).

The old Flavian, wrapped in blankets, was not only depicted as having wings, John Chrysostom assured the people that it was enough for Flavian to appear for the emperor to sign the pardon of the Antiochians. „I am sure", he says, in the third homily, „that as soon as he appears before our faithful emperor and sees his face, the anger kindled against us will be calmed by this meeting. Not only the words of the saints, but their faces shine with a spiritual grace."

John Chrysostom had serious reasons for announcing Flavian's victory before the old man had even reached Constantinople. In addition to the speech he drafted and handed to Flavian to read to the emperor, he organized in detail a campaign to tame Theodosius. It was impossible for this cause to fail. John Golden Mouth set everything in motion to get the emperor to pardon Antioch.

In Flavian's suite there were people tasked with learning from the court singers songs specially composed to ask for Antioch's pardon. During Flavian's stay in Constantinople, the singers and dancers no longer had to have songs and dances of joy in their program to amuse Theodosius. They had only to sing long litanies and mime scenes in their dances to show the Antiochians pain and sorrow.

The servants, the cupbearers, all the staff of the imperial palace had to work to get the emperor to pardon Antioch. At every glass of water, at every dish, when a letter or a bathrobe was brought to him, a phrase had to be said to remind the emperor about Antioch and to ask him for the pardon of its inhabitants.

John Chrysostom composed these "slogans" and sent them to Constantinople with Flavian.

Here is an example of a tirade that had to be recited to the emperor as if by chance, at a certain moment of the day: „Think that it is about the fate not of one or two or ten, but of an incalculable number of souls, and of a capital of the universe. It is the city where the name "Christian" was first uttered. Honor Christ and respect this city which gave its disciples such a gentle and venerable name for the first time (*3rd homily to the people of Antioch*). Here is an honor that no city on earth can claim and even Rome itself cannot claim" (*16th homily to the people of Antioch*).

John Goldenmouth had organized everything in such a way to soften the emperor's heart. In the same speech, in which he informed the Antiochians that the act of pardon would certainly be signed by the emperor, he asked them to become Christians. Not Christians just by name, but real Christians.

„Our father Flavian fulfills his mission far away, and we, without leaving the city, fulfill an embassy to the King of heaven: let us help Flavian with our prayers" (*3rd homily to the people of Antioch*).

The words spoken by John in those days, when the prefect Tisamen was drowning the city in blood, were the only words of hope addressed to the unfortunate people of Antioch condemned to mass death for breaking a few statues.

All the citizens gathered around John. All the people of Antioch became Christians and competed in virtue. „The whole city seems to have become a church, Antioch resembles a noble lady" says John.

The citizens of Antioch practiced, until the last, all the Christian virtues. Exactly as John asked them. The streets were empty, but the church was full, day and night. People stopped drinking, swearing and lying. John asked the Antiochians to practice one of the most difficult virtues: to love their enemies. „I say it, I proclaim it, I make it public with a loud voice: none of those who have enemies should come forward to the holy mass and receive the Body of the Lord; none of those who have approached should keep feelings of enmity in their hearts. Do you hate your enemies? Do not come forward" (*20th homily to the people of Antioch*).

In those days, the Antiochians successfully passed the terrible test of Christianity: the love of enemies, sincerely loving their enemies as their brothers.

The fear of death

The event that took place on March 15 was known by all the residents of Antioch before dawn. Everyone was aware of the terrible things that were to happen at any moment. Indeed, word spread that the emperor Theodosius had sent two high magistrates and troops to destroy Antioch from the foundations and to exterminate the citizens to the last. The column of soldiers and magistrates had been seen. There were eyewitnesses. They were close to Antioch and advancing very quickly.

At dawn, the population of Antioch left their homes and first took refuge in the church. John was present. He had done everything in his power to save Antio ch. He had done everything to soften the emperor's heart. John Chrysostom had Christianized all of Antioch. He sent Flavian to Constantinople with the speech he had drafted himself, accompanied by a retinue of people who would have helped him soften Theodosius' heart.

Although he traveled like a winged youth, Flavian hadn't yet reached Constantinople. Instead, the imperial messengers and the soldiers in charge of the extermination advanced in the direction of Antioch.

During this time the prefect Tisamen appeared at the church of Ioan Gura de Aur. Attracted by the cries of the inhabitants and warned that the Antiochians wanted to leave the city, all, even the last one, the prefect came to the church: Tisamen was a pagan. But he was perfect. A prefect has the right to enter everywhere. So Tisamen entered the church. With his prefect walk. He climbed into the pulpit where John the Golden Mouth preached. And Tisamen addressed the people. He said that it was not necessary for the citizens to leave the city. The emperor indeed sent high magistrates to Antioch. Their names were Hellebicus - the head of the militia - and Caesarius - the emperor's master of offices. They were sent by the emperor, but they did not bring the order to exterminate the population. For now, the imperial legates will make an inquiry and present the results to the prefect. The decision to destroy Antioch or not will be made later. In order to be believed, the prefect Tisamen gave his word of honor that Hellebicus and Cezarius were not coming to demolish the city, nor to kill the population as they had thought, but only to make an inquiry. The citizens breathed a sigh of relief. The looks brightened. The death sentence had been postponed.

When John saw the believers with their backs turned to the altar and with all hope turned towards the pagan prefect, he to cry. He cried because the souls of the Antiochians were offered to anyone, only to be saved from death. The Antiochians were about to be lost. For John, the lost soul of a man was the greatest loss that can exist in the universe. „I mourn the loss of a soul, whose price equals that of the nations, or rather surpasses it" he said. This time it was not a single soul. All souls had taken the road to their doom. And all because of the fear of death.

After the prefect's departure, John ascended the pulpit. He climbed into the same pulpit that the prefect had left: „I would have liked the earth to open to swallow me when I heard a stranger addressing you, sometimes calming your cries, sometimes reprimanding you for giving in to your weakness," John said.

He reminded the Antiochians that a Christian is not afraid of losing his house, his wealth and his earthly possessions: the Christian is "a stranger and a pilgrim on earth." His homeland is in heaven. Instead of teaching the pagans not to fear death or pain, the citizens of Antioch, who were Christians, received advice from the pagans. „You were not meant to receive such lessons. Rather you had to be teachers yourself". At the last moment, the Antiochians had become true Christians. Even John, the shepherd, praised them. But at the moment when the Antiochians had to put into practice the supreme virtue of Christianity, the contempt of death, they backed down. They didn't pass this test of virtue. They were not Christ's athletes. And John tells them: „Don't show me the athlete in the middle of the (empty) stadium, show him in the strongest moment of the fight. Don't talk to me about the piety that is just listening, talk to me about the one that shows himself in action" (*16th homily to the people of Antioch*). And he continues: „Whoever listens to my teaching and doesn't put it into practice, is like a fool who builds his house on sand" (Matei 7, 26-27).

John suffered from the weakness of the Antiochians as if he had suffered in his own body. „Your cowardice has spread darkness and pain over me, I can no longer control my soul, I am so overcome with indignation and sorrow. How can I not suffer seeing that after the teachings of the holy word (Scripture), you needed the teaching of the Greeks to exhort you and to determine you to resist with strength the fear that grips you from all sides".

The Antiochians listened to John Chrysostom. Without a doubt, he was right. But what could they do in the face of danger? John Chrysostom guessed the thoughts of the believers. „What could we do, it will be said? Aren't we human?”. John reminded them that they were people, but Christian people. „Instead of dealing with the messenger, you had to bend your knee, call upon the Lord, sigh fervently, and the Lord would've removed the danger.”

If the Lord wanted the Antiochians to be massacred, they should've allowed themselves to be massacred with a smile on their faces and convinced that they were doing God's will. They should've allowed themselves to be massacred with greatness - with such greatness - that the soldiers and the executioners were amazed by this greatness of the Christians.

„Such is the soul of the saints,” he told them. „When danger threatens them, the saints don't think how they can escape, but devote all their efforts to win over their persecutors, to the cause of truth” (*16th homily to the people of Antioch*).

John decided to perform the most daring act of his life: the conversion to Christianity of the policemen sent to massacre the population and destroy the city. They had to be brought to the path of faith as quickly as possible. For the blood flowed in waves. Imperial envoys and executioners had to be Christianized without delay.

There was only one way to bring the policemen to faith: the Antiochians had to endure death, torture and all the sufferings with such greatness and serenity that the policemen were moved. The executioners had to be overcome with admiration. The victims had to be so great that their grandeur would amaze them, astonish the torturers.

John knew this could be done. It was in the power of man. It had been made possible by the Holy Apostle Paul.

Brought before his judges, Paul had been so worthy, so strong in his faith, and so strong in his suffering, that the judges were astonished at the attitude of the saint. John Golden Mouth said to the Antiochians: „See what is happening between Paul and his judge. Paul comes to defend himself. And when he withdraws, the judge is won over to his cause. The judge himself is the one who says with these words: It took a little time to convince me to become a Christian.”. (Faptele Apostolilor 26, 28)

John Chrysostom invites the Antiochians to imitate Paul: „This is how you should act today. You should have given the prefect of this city the opportunity to admire your greatness of soul, your restraint full of calmness and dignity. It would've been desirable that your behavior served as a lesson for him and that, leaving this assembly, he would have nothing to do but to testify his admiration for your conduct, to bring deserved praise for your behavior and learn from this experience what the difference is between Christians and pagans”. This is how the Antiochians should've behaved when they found out that they would be massacred during the same day: „This is how a true Christian behaves. Saint Paul behaved like this. Paul said: I would like, from the bottom of my heart, like all of you, who hear me, to become Christians like me”. (Faptele Apostolilor 26, 29)

John would've acted in the same way. And this is how he would've liked to see the Antiochians behave in those tragic hours. If the Antiochians had behaved like Paul, they would've been true Christians. The executioners and the police would've been disarmed. But the Antiochians were weak. They were lost because they were afraid of death. But John Chrysostom loved people not only for their qualities, but even for their faults, as Jesus had taught on the mountain. And now he wanted to save the people from the massacre, even though they had been weak. But in order to disarm the soldiers, policemen and magistrates, John needed true Christians, who would go to death with a smile on their lips and full of greatness.

John Golden Mouth remembered that there were genuine Christians on earth, that is, people who could offer their lives with the same carelessness with which they offered an old coat. These true Christians were the hermits and ascetics of the desert and mountain tops. They were the hermits, the old solitude companions of John Golden Mouth. „The anchorites are the keepers of the treasure of the teaching and religion of the apostles". Led in front of the executioners, these hermits would've stopped the massacre, they would've amazed them with such Christian greatness.

Ioan Gura de Aur therefore sent messengers into the desert, on the tops of the mountains, to the most hidden places where the anchorites lived. It was hard to find them. Some of them were built in caves and only a small hole in the wall allowed a brother to give them some water and vegetables from time to time. Others were hidden on mountain tops where only the bird in flight could enter. Others were in the heart of the desert. Others, deep in the woods. John knew the places and the hermits. He had lived among them for six years. He sent them a message, begging them to appear in Antioch without delay to save their brothers from death and torture.

The message was broadcast and it reached the last cave, the most remote and isolated of the hermits. Everyone received John Chrysostom's message and the hermits began to appear in Antioch. They were true Christians who were not afraid of death or pain. They were like Paul. They were like Jesus. They were Christians. And they came one after the other. Some of them were nothing more than skin and bones, dressed in rags or in animal skins. With beards and hair down to their waists, with large rods they appeared in Antioch, to make the massacre stop.

The tortures

At the same time as the hermits, the priests and bishops of the cities and villages of Syria were invited to Antioch. After sending this message, John went to the court.

Hellebicus and Caesarius were doing their job. They didn't yet have the order to exterminate the Antiochians. They had orders to conduct an investigation. Ever since their arrival in the city, the imperial envoys abolished all the privileges of Antioch. From the arrival of Hellebicus and Caesarius, "Beautiful Antioch" was no longer the capital of Syria.

Antioch no longer had the right to have baths. It was no longer supposed to have a theater, nor any place of entertainment, it was no longer supposed to have a hippodrome. It no longer had the right to light its streets. After this degradation of the city, the imperial envoys ordered massive arrests. It started with the arrest of the highest officials guilty of not foreseeing and preventing the breaking of the four statues. The senators had not participated in the destruction of the statues, but it was logical that they should be arrested. Senators were representatives of the people. Arresting the representatives of those who had broken the statues was therefore a logical fact. After the arrest of the senators and officials, the police began to hunt down people at random.

John went to the court.

„Frightened by this sad loneliness, I went with an icy heart to the praetorium where the magistrates sent by the emperor were sitting. I wanted to witness the denouement of this terrible ordeal. There I saw lying close to the palace gates, a terrified, destroyed crowd, which barely breathed in the grip of a deathly terror. It was a heartbreaking sight. Near this sinister-looking praetorium, everyone - men, women, children, old people - speechless with emotion, looked at each other in amazement. They seemed to have neither the power to question nor the ability to understand each other. They doubted each other, because at every moment they witnessed the betrayals that led to being caught and brought before the judges even those who based their escape on their innocence. In this overwhelming situation, we raised our eyes full of tears to the sky, we raised our hands in silence. But the heart discharged its bitterness, addressed its supplications to God and made the cries of sadness heard. The heart was asking for help, asking heaven to assist the conscience of the judges, to tame the stubbornness of their hearts and to sweeten the rigor of their sentence.

Such was the heart-rending spectacle that presented itself to my gaze at the gate of the Praetorium. But, when I entered the interior of this theater of torture, I felt my soul gripped by horror at the sight of the terrifying apparatus of justice. I was in the presence of soldiers armed with clubs, swords, giving their strength and cooperation to the rigor of the magistrates. All the guilty had their father, their mother, their children, their wives, their friends at the gate of the praetorium. If any sentence of death came to remove this crowd from sorrow and fill it with terror, the soldiers came to repulse the movements of despair by force, to secure the triumph of the judgments of justice, and to put a check on the tumult by threat and arms... the shouts of the executioners, the noise of the chains, the fearful threats of the judges, the groans of the victims struck the ears.

And as the convicts received their sentence, they themselves were subjected to even more atrocious tortures. The Praetorium offered, therefore, only torture outside, torture inside. Inside mourning, outside mourning... As for me, sitting at a distance, I was watching this show..." (*13th homily to the people of Antioch*). „None of these pains troubled the judges who sat within. Their only concern was to thoroughly instruct this trial".

From time to time, convoys of convicts appeared in the square, "handcuffed in iron chains". In front of this spectacle, John was thinking about the summons sent to the ascetics, who could tame wild beasts and barbarians. He had called these saints to Antioch, to perform a miracle more difficult than the taming of crocodiles, lions, tigers and wild animals. He called the saints of the desert to tame the judges, the police and the soldiers. Only Saint Paul had succeeded, until that date, in taming the judges, the policemen and the soldiers.

The desert's saints

One fine day, the saints appeared on the streets of Antioch. Some were almost devoid of clothes: they were only skeletons covered with sunburned skin. Others had their bodies wrapped in animal skins. John shouted: „They, who for so many years were locked in their caves... abandoned on their rocks, in their cells, ran here from all sides, like angels descended from heaven".

Poor people whose entire wealth was a coarse garment, who led the roughest life, whose existence was even ignored before, who lived in the middle of the mountains and in the forests. „These saints were now descending on the streets of mourning Antioch". The streets were full of these holy people „whose mere presence served as a consolation to our wretched fellow-citizens and urged them to despise the disasters that threatened them" (*17th homily to the people of Antioch*).

The desert's saints came to save from the massacre the people „whom they had never seen before, whom they had never heard speak, with whom they had never had ties, whom they knew only through their unhappiness, showing them so much love that if they had had an infinity of lives, they would've willingly given them to save these unfortunates" (*17th homily to the people of Antioch*).

In order to tame the policemen and the judges who devoured the Antiochians, the hermits' actions lasted one day, one day only. The saints appeared at dawn. At sunset, the police, who were devouring Antioch, were tamed. The saints came from the desert. They knew how to tame wild beasts.

Macedonius

John writes that the appearance of hermits on the streets of Antioch was like a descent of angels to earth. But he goes on to say that these ascetics had another aspect than that of angels.

In Antioch, „when all the world was dismayed and terrified, they appeared like lions in the public square". John writes that the ascetics „were like brave warriors who, even before meeting their adversaries, force them to flee by their mere appearance and the sound of their voices!"

This is how the saints of the desert were now appearing on the streets of Antioch: as athletes and as angels, that is, devoid of all that was earthly, without shields, spears, tongs or hooks. One of them was called Macedonius. No one had seen his face before. He lived in seclusion in the desert, but his name was known throughout the empire. He was known as Macedonius Critophagus, meaning the barley eater.

All his life, since he was in the desert, Macedonius had eaten nothing but barley. He had come now to tame the policemen. He was one of the first saints who appeared to save Antioch. Arriving in the square, he met Hellebicus and Cezarius, who were riding towards the court, accompanied by a strong escort. The holy barley eater blocked their way and ordered them to get off their horses. The guards were amazed to see that the Imperial envoys were carrying out the orders of a beggar. And they didn't dare to push Macedonius aside. After Hellebicus and Caesarius got off their horses, Macedonius ordered them to go to Constantinople, both of them on the same day, and to inform the emperor Theodosius that, however emperor he might be, he had no right to kill even a single man.

It's true that the Antiochians broke some statues, says Macedonius. It's not nice to break statues. But in the meantime, the Antiochians erected more beautiful ones than those that had been destroyed. If the emperor killed an innocent man, he, the emperor, couldn't build another. The emperor could not manufacture even a hair of a living man. And, concluded Macedonius, since the emperor is unable to build a living man, he has no right to kill him. The emperor must put his sword in its sheath and stop touching people. Every human is created in the image of God. Every human is a copy of God.

Macedonius's phrases were poetic as was the speech of the people of Antioch at that time. Macedonius commanded the imperial envoys to inform the emperor that he had no right to erase any human face from the book of life, for every human face was a copy of God's face.

The imperial envoys told Macedonius, out of simple politeness, that they would convey his very wise words to the emperor. It was a simple formula. After which Hellebicus and Caesarius mounted again in the saddle and went into the praetorium. But their investigative zeal had waned. Some of the enthusiasm, with which they had condemned people to torture, was gone. The saint's words remained in their memory. There are haunting truths. And the saint's words couldn't be erased from their minds.

One day only

The hermits who came to save Antioch were numerous. For these hermits, Hellebicus, Caesarius and even the emperor, were like the accused: copies of God's image, they were all equal. God alone was the judge. Because of this, the hermits spoke to the policemen, magistrates and the accused as equals, and called everyone by name. John writes: „Seeing them, who wouldn't have despised death?... Who wouldn't have despised life...? They were not afraid to approach the judges and intercede in favor of the accusations, saying that they were willing to shed their blood and sacrifice their heads to tear the prisoners from the punishments ready to strike them" (*17th homily to the people of Antioch*).

Antioch was deserted. The hermits who appeared in the streets were looking for people, headed without any guide towards the praetorium. Since morning, the hermits had occupied the court and the surrounding streets. The army couldn't repulse them because they didn't fear either the soldiers' spears or their swords.

„They spent the whole day sitting before the gates of the praetorium, ready to snatch the condemned from the hands of the executioners". They offered themselves to be executed in place of those condemned to death. They forced the hands of the executioners to release the victims and kill them. They threw themselves before the torturers asking to be tortured, but to release the accused. Within hours, the imperial tribunal in Antioch was paralyzed. Neither the soldiers, nor the judges, nor the executioners could do their job anymore.

People could no longer be tortured or killed because between the executioners and the victims were the saints who begged to be hit. „They protested that they would not withdraw before the judges had pardoned the people of this city". The judges answered that it wasn't in their power to pardon the Antiochians. The ascetics ordered the magistrates to stop pronouncing death sentences. They decided to go on foot to Constantinople and return with the pardon signed by the emperor. But during their absence, the judges would have to stop condemning anyone. If the judges want to kill certain culprits, some of the saints will remain before the tribunal, so that their heads will be cut off instead of the accused.

The judges were dismayed by this attitude. They accepted the proposals of the ascetics and promised not to execute anyone until their return from Constantinople. But when Hellebicus and Caesarius saw these innumerable skeletons without flesh or muscle, these men without any physical strength, ready to undertake a journey of a thousand and one hundred kilometers with bare feet, they stopped them. The hermits were invited to draft a memorandum for the emperor in which they asked for the pardon of Antioch. Then Hellebicus and Caesarius went themselves to the emperor with the memorandum to relieve the army of the saints from the toil of the journey. The two imperial envoys also participated in the action of the saints in their military way, making the way from Antioch to Constantinople in six days. It was a record.

All this time the investigation was suspended. The hermits withdrew from the city that same evening and returned to their hermitages satisfied, giving glory to God.

The Antiochians were saved. John succeeded. He writes: „Thus one day was sufficient for these pious men to come down from their mountains, plead your cause, scatter your misery, and then return to their dwellings".

The pardon order

In Constantinople, the old bishop Flavian recited to the emperor the speech composed by John Chrysostom. He was telling Theodosius that the crown of emperor of Rome was really beautiful. „It is true that this diadem is the symbol of your virtue, but it also testifies to the generosity of him who imparted it to you, while the crown of your humanity will have been due to yourself alone, and you will owe it only to your philosophy. If people admire these precious stones, which shine on your forehead, how much more will they admire the victory you will win over your heart".

Flavian ended up convincing Theodosius that, by forgiving the Antiochians, he would gain even greater glory, so that future centuries would only speak of him. „For it is easy for a master to punish his disobedient subjects. But it is rare and difficult to forgive them. You will set a great example to the centuries to come".

Theodosius wanted to Christianize the universe. He had signed laws by which all those who practiced pagan cults were punished by death, he had ordered the destruction of temples. He had declared that the marriage between a Christian and a pagan was null and void.

Flavian wanted to flatter this weakness of the emperor who wanted to Christianize the empire through the penal code. Flavian told the emperor that Jews and pagans, seeing the act of forgiveness of Antioch, would cry out: „Great God, what amazing power Christians have! They will come to take refuge en masse under the maternal wings of a religion that knows how to demand such a sublime morality from its sons. You see what is the power of the Christian religion. It stopped the indignation and anger of an emperor".

Flavian told Theodosius that he was not only the ambassador of the Antiochians, but that he came specially as the ambassador of God. „I come from God to declare to you that if you will forgive these people their faults and their weaknesses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. Think of the fearful day when we will have to give account of our works. The judgment you will pronounce, will be your own sentence".

This was the speech that John Golden Mouth had drafted for Flavian. John didn't omit any argument to soften the imperial heart. He told Flavian to declare to the emperor that if he didn't pardon the Antiochians, Flavian would not return. Of choice, of necessity, the bishop said to the emperor: „If you do not forgive Antioch, not only will I not return to see it go down to the grave, but I will go to seek another asylum. I will go to die on a foreign shore, far from my homeland".

Together with Flavian, all the palace staff pleaded for the pardon of Antioch. Then came the imperial legates Hellebicus and Caesarius, bearers of the memory of the hermits. Approached from all sides, Teodosie signed the act of pardoning the city of Antioch. This rescue was John's work.

The pardon order arrived during Passion Week. Antioch celebrated at the same time the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and its own resurrection from the dead. John won a new victory on the path of holiness. He fought like a great athlete to save Antioch. He won the battle. It was a victory that only a saint, only a true athlete of Christ could achieve.

Chapter 5

Citizens of heaven

After saving Antioch and its inhabitants from death, John Golden Mouth began the fight to save the true homeland of the Antiochians, their eternal homeland. Because the true homeland of the Antiochians was not their wonderful city. In Antioch, as in all the cities of the world, people were only pilgrims and foreigners even if they were born there from father to son. John Golden Mouth told them: „Don't forget, if you are Christians, that your homeland is not on earth. Our names are written in heaven. There we shall truly enjoy the name of citizen" (*17th homily to the people of Antioch*).

„Let your feet be shod, ready to follow of the Gospel" (Efeseni 6, 15). He cited his own life as an example. In Antioch he lived somewh at more austere than even in the desert.

The homilies of John Golden Mouth were listened to by a huge crowd and while listening to him, the audience waved handkerchiefs, applauded, cried and shouted. The East never had a greater orator. Saint Nile compared him to "a river that rolls gold". Isidore the Pelusian declared that Greece had never had such a great orator, and Suidas compared him to the falls of the Nile.

However, John wanted his homilies to be less applauded and his teachings more followed. But the crowd loved him. First as an orator. Then they adored and admired him as a saint. He was a small man. He was so fragile that you expected to see him collapse at the slightest breath of wind. But his eyes were two lights burning with faith.

When he began to speak, his small body was no longer visible. „Praise not a man because of his beauty, and hate no man because of his appearance" he said, „the bee is small among winged creatures, but nothing is sweeter than the honey she makes" (*Susan's History 11, 2.3*). And David was small. As was John. But the outward appearance is of no importance because: „All the glory of the king's daughter is within". Everything outside is „unimportant".

In this era, John Golden Mouth was a mature man. And a mature man deals with serious things, he doesn't deal with trifles. Historical and political realities are minor things, unworthy of a mature man. John said: „Let us not follow in the footsteps of children, despising big things and ecstasizing in front of small ones". The "small things" are earthly glories, kings, governors, prime ministers, and all the rest. John ignored them, although he had to fight with the policemen and judges who wanted to devour the citizens of Antioch. He knew how terrible is the destructive power of these characters; but he paid no more attention to them than Macedonius, the holy barley-eater. But he makes the same efforts for their salvation as for the salvation of all people. He cares about their souls.

One day, when Asterius, the Comite of the East, announced to him that he wanted to visit the church of the martyrs near Antioch, John Goldenmouth agreed to accompany him. Visiting a church where the bodies of martyrs are buried is a profitable thing for any man. So he accepted the meeting. The church of the martyrs was located at the exit from Antioch, on the banks of the Orontes, close to the Romanesia gate. It was the end of November, the meeting was fixed for the evening. John went to the Romanesian gate with his donkey cart. The count came in a carriage drawn by thoroughbred horses, adorned with the imperial emblems in gold. At the Romanesia gate, the committee invited John to make the journey from the gate to the church in his carriage and he accepted. He went up with the comites in the carriage upholstered with silk and velvet. Then, they both left for the church of the martyrs. It was almost night.

God willing

As soon as the horses set off, the committee told John Chrysostom that he wasn't going to visit the church of the martyrs. Asterius politely asked him to excuse him for lying to a man of God. Besides, the carriage with imperial emblems took a completely different road than the one that took it to the church of the martyrs. The committee had received orders from the emperor to send John Chrysostom to Constantinople as discreetly as possible.

On September 17, Nectarius, the bishop of Constantinople, had died. The emperor refused to recognize the candidates who presented themselves. Emperor Arcadius wanted John Chrysostom to become bishop of Constantinople. And because the population of Antioch loved John Chrysostom very much and would've been able to make a revolution if they found out that the preacher had been taken from them, the emperor decided to make the saint leave Antioch in the greatest secrecy. Without anyone knowing, as Asterius had just done.

In the first locality after Antioch, the imperial carriage was waiting together with two plainclothes policemen, with two "curios", as members of the secret police were called at that time. John was surprised to learn that the emperor knew him. The count smiled and explained to him that the emperor had a secret service, an entire army of "curios", who communicated to him everything that was happening in the whole world.

The emperor's prime minister, Eutropius, went to Antioch to hear a sermon by John Chrysostom. Eutropius was impressed, he liked the homily very much. Returning to Constantinople, Eutropius asked to read this priest's record file. From this record it appeared that John Golden Mouth was a true saint. He had only one coat, he ate only once a day, he slept in a room without furniture, on a bed of boards. The police knew everything about the life of the saint, from his childhood until that day. They knew he had been in the desert and that he had saved Antioch.

So, when Bishop Nectarius died, Eutropius proposed to the emperor to bring John Golden Mouth to Constantinople and make him bishop. The emperor accepted. And so that there would be no confusion and disorder in the city, Eutropius ordered Asterius to make the saint leave the city without anyone's knowledge. And now, Asterius, the Comite of the East, acquits himself of this imperial mission. In the carriage, he assured John that he had warm blankets and that the "curious" policemen would make sure he wasn't cold and tired. In conclusion, they will be careful with him. The carriage reached its destination, John Golden Mouth got off, left the comite Asterius and got into the carriage that was supposed to take him to Constantinople.

John knew that he was the servant of God. For this reason he accepted. He had only one concern: to keep his „soul pure, the rest is of no importance”. God seeks „no brilliant eloquence, no learned arrangement of words, but the beauty of souls”. He had to keep his soul clean. Wherever he was, he was to be God's servant only. He will never be the emperor's servant. Nor theempress's. Nor Eutropius's. Even as a bishop. He will remain only God's servant. „If I sought to please people, I would no longer be God's servant” (Galateni 1, 10).

John traveled with only one thought: not to please people, but to please God. It was everything. And - there, in the carriage - he asked the Lord to help him in this decision. Without God's help, man cannot achieve anything. Even an athlete like John. For this reason, he begged God's help to remain only a servant of God Jesus. He was praying in the carriage. Because John knew that God is always close to people. Even in a carriage with imperial emblems. „Am I only a God nearby and not a God far away?" (Jeremiah 23, 23), the Creator had said. People can pray to God at any time and in any place.

Gold and silver

In Constantinople, John was welcomed by the emperor with a lavish reception. In a short time, John met all the dignitaries of the empire and all the personalities.

John, who had lived six years in the desert and in caves, was stunned by the splendor of the capital. When he was led to the imperial palace, or the sacred palace, as it was called, the saint, who had only one pair of shoes, had to walk along the avenues paved with gold. For all the alleys of Arcadius' palace were covered with golden sand. According to Synesius - who lived in this era - there was a special naval service that did nothing but bring golden sand from India to cover the walkways of the imperial palace. Now the saint walked in amazement on these golden avenues. He describes the emperor's procession thus:

„Imagine the imperial procession... the soldiers glittering with gold, the harness, the white donkeys with golden bridles, the carriage glittering with precious stones, plated with moving blades of metal and upholstered with silk cloth embroidered with dragons, the shields adorned with gold, the horses laden with gold and with golden bridles. But the appearance of the emperor eclipses all, he alone attracts the eye, with the purple mantle, with his diadem and scepter, with his red shoes and the majesty of his face”.

But not only the emperor dressed in gold and precious stones. Private people in Constantinople lived in the same luxury: „Have they not amphoras, pots, and other receptacles of gold? What shall we say of these women (despite my shame, I must speak of this too) who order night-pots in silver? Silver plates are still acceptable, says the saint, but ignoble (low, dirty) vessels in silver? What an aberration! Yes, yes, if it were in their power, the rich would have everything made of solid gold, the earth, the walls, even the sky and the air".

John, who advised the Christian women in Antioch to wear no adornment, he was dismayed. „If it is forbidden to a woman to adorn her head with gold and pearls, what pardon shall she receive who uses silver for such a vile use?". John was frightened by the manners of these Christians whose souls he had to save and be their shepherd.

„Are there not chairs and stools of solid silver enough, though this luxury is itself intolerable? I fear lest, running thus madly, the women will soon become monsters. I think their dream is to have golden hair, golden eyebrows, and clothe their whole bodies in gold leaf. Don't think that I'm joking. Right now, doesn't the emperor of Persia have a golden beard, has he skilled artists who apply gold leaves to his hair, like a warp? A real phenomenon!".

Silver nightstands and urinals didn't only exist in palaces and private homes. In the episcopal palace, where the saint was supposed to live, things were almost the same. John Chrysostom's predecessor, former bishop Nectarius, had been prefect of Constantinople. At the time of retirement, the prefect was invited by the emperor to assume the functions of bishop. He was baptized in a hurry, because he was still a pagan (in this era baptism was sometimes delayed until the deathbed), and he was installed. In the episcopal palace everything was made of gold and silver. There were silk and velvet sofas, pricy paintings, golden chandeliers, a huge kitchen like a factory, with the best cooks in Constantinople.

John realized that, having become a bishop, in order to please God, he had to fight in Constantinople more fiercely than in the desert, and that in his fight he would be more alone than in the cave. But he was determined not to please men, but to please God.

Arcadius

For the moment, John was watching carefully around him. From the description he gave to the imperial court, it can be seen that he was observing everything., because he was determined to demolish everything that wasn't pleasing to God. After seeing that the emperor had red shoes and was covered with as much gold as his body could carry, John saw the emperor up close. His name was Arcadius, a twenty years old young man. He was a Christian, raised in the Christian religion since his earliest childhood by Arsenius, whom we find today in the calendar under the name of Saint Arsenius the Great.

Arcadius was the son of Theodosius the Great. Theodosius, the deceased father of the current emperor, had a plan to save the empire, a plan that his son followed. Theodosius planned to save the Roman empire from the fall with the means at his disposal. The Roman army was in decay. Theodosius hired german officers and soldiers.

The officials of the empire were corrupt. Theodosius counted more on the bishops than on the officials, in positions of trust he appointed faithful and honest officials whom he then clothed in cassocks. This is how he proceeded with Nectarius, the predecessor of John Chrysostom. In this way, the citizens listened to the officials because they listened to the bishops.

Theodosius had two sons: Arcadius and Honorius. But they weren't able to rule such a vast empire. Therefore, Theodosius divided the empire in two and gave the western half to his son Honorius, and the eastern half to Arcadius. He also gave them advicing guardians, because they wouldn't have managed to govern alone. But Theodosius' main objective was that his two sons would rule with the help of the Christian Church. The church was the only healthy institution of the empire.

Arcadius and Honorius received from Theodosius the advice to rely more on the Church than on the army. Christianity was consolidated with the help of the police and the penal code. Through a law (March 2), Theodosius forbade the Apollonian sectarians to have churches and priests. Through another law (February 29) he declared null any marriage contracted between Christians and Jews. Whoever didn't respect this law was condemned for adultery. Whoever was guilty of sodomy or other sins against Christian law, was burned alive, in public. Arius' followers were expelled from the cities. Those who abandoned Christianity, lost all their civil rights. With these methods, Theodosius wanted to strengthen the Church. He died on January 17, 395 and left his will to his sons to continue his work.

Arcadius became emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire at eighteen. He was now receiving John Chrysostom with all the honors, because before he died, his father had told him that a bishop was more important to the empire than all the leaders of the army. Because of this, he was extremely respectful towards John. Arcadius was at this time twenty years old and small in stature. John noted that he had a young face, that he was anemic and stammered when speaking, as if he had a hard tongue. But what particularly impressed John Chrysostom was that Emperor Arcadius seemed to be asleep as he spoke to him. Indeed, Arcadius kept his eyes half closed at all times. He lived by sleeping. Not only the emperor's eyes were closed as during sleep, his mind was closed too. Arcadius suffered, we would say today, from vital insufficiency. He was a stranger to everything that was happening around him. When John Chrysostom arrived, Arcadius opened his eyes wide. His father told him that the strength of the empire lay in the bishops.

Arcadius' respect for the bishops and the Church was a pious and superstitious respect. The Empire didn't dare to harm the Church for, though asleep, Arcadius was an obedient son. At the welcoming audience with the bishop, Arcadius showed respect and kept his eyes open. This rarely happened to him. It was the second time in his life.

It only happened to him once to open his eyes and look carefully. It was the day the chief of the imperial eunuchs, Eutropius, showed him the portrait of a young girl. This young girl was so beautiful that Arcadius opened his eyes and looked at the portrait. After that, he declared that he wanted to marry this young woman urgently, then he closed his eyes again, waiting for the eunuch Eutropius to do the necessary things in order to marry the young blonde, whose name was Eudoxia.

Eudoxia

At the first audience at the palace, John also met Eudoxia. Two years had passed since she was empress. Eudoxia was a different woman from the other women of Constantinople. It was normal for her to be this way, Eudoxia being a foreigner. She was the daughter of a Germanic general who had served in the Roman army. His father had died faithful to his Germanic religion. But he had made his daughter a Christian.

In Constantinople it was easier for an orphan, if she was a Christian, to reach a high position and get married. Christianity was the state religion. Paganism was persecuted. The general didn't want his daughter to be persecuted because of religion after his death. So he agreed to be baptized to save the young woman from trouble. Eudoxia had become a very good Christian. She looked like Lorelai (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorelei). She was also from the s ame family, her tribe also lived on the Rhine.

She was tall, proud and full of Nordic charm. Just like Lorelai in the folk song that bewitched the sailors on the Rhine. Eudoxia's charm and her exotic femininity were so great that even her portrait could bewitch. Before even seeing her, the emperor had fallen in love with her portrait. Arcadius had proposed to her based on her image alone.

John found out that Eudoxia was a supporter of the Church and this made him happy. A soul that lives in faith is a reason for joy. He therefore enjoyed the piety of Emperor Arcadius and the piety of Empress Eudoxia.

Bishop of Constantinople

John was consecrated bishop on February 26, 398. It was an enthronement with great pomp. When he left Antioch, he was a priest. The ordination ceremony was presided over by Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria. Theophilus was one of the worst bishops the Church had. He was nicknamed "the Christian pharaoh". He was cruel like a pharaoh and in love with gold and precious stones like a pharaoh, and also like a pharaoh he despised people. Theophilus didn't love John Chrysostom. He would've wanted to place one of his Egyptians on the episcopal throne of Constantinople. But the emperor and Eutropius wanted John. Against his will, Theophilus had to sanctify him. After his enthronement, according to custom, John Chrysostom sent a letter to the bishop of Rome, Siricius, as well as to the other patriarchs. John had great respect for Rome, because Saints Peter and Paul had died in Rome.

From this city, the two apostles had left for heaven. John revered the descendants of the apostles. Once this formality was fulfilled, John entered the palace where he was to live from now on.

On the first day, he made some changes. He changed certain things in the episcopal palace that could displease God. John ordered all the silver vessels to be sold, and the money from the sale to be given to the poor. Then he sold the carpets and with this money he built a hospital for the poor. John then sold the sofas, the marble bathrooms and the chandeliers. With the silver from this sale, he built an asylum for foreigners in Constantinople. He sold the mirrors, the paintings, the columns. He sold everything and left the walls bare. He sold the bed of silk, velvet and rare wood in which his predecessor Nectarius had slept. He had a wooden bed and a blanket brought to him. He didn't need decorations on the walls. He had only the icon of St. Paul above his work table in his room. Then John called the cooks. There was a whole army of cooks, stewards, administrators, waiters. He paid all their salaries and released them from their posts. He sent the cooking utensils and all the equipment to the kitchens of the poor asylums.

The episcopal palace staff had never seen anything like this before. The employees dared to respectfully tell the saint that the bishop of Constantinople was the second bishop of the world, that he had official obligations. He had to give receptions, and all those kitchen items and all that tableware were absolutely indispensable to him. The emperor himself, as well as the empress, had to be invited. That was the protocol. John got upset. He replied that a bishop was not an innkeeper who invites people to give them a meal. A bishop is a doctor and a spiritual father. To give these words a meaning, he had the living room, with its chairs, tables and sideboards, sold. Absolutely everything. He promised never to invite anyone to dinner and said he would dine alone, as he had done all his life. He no longer needed a cook and dishes. He prepared himself, or with the help of a monk, the vegetables that made up his only food.

The aristocracy, who were looking forward to being invited to the bishop's receptions, as they had always been, were amused to learn that the saint only ate once a day - around six o'clock in the evening - and that he dined alone in his cell. The menu was always the same: vegetables and water. After the meal, the saint worked until almost midnight. He didn't sleep more than three hours a night. The rich didn't imagine that the second bishop of the world could lead such a harsh life. But they were convinced that a saint could.

The rich loved the holy bishop, they considered him an original. They came in droves to listen to his sermons. Only one character didn't want to believe at first that John led such a life. It was the old bishop Acachie, a friend of John's. Acachie took John Chrysostom's first message to the bishop of Rome. He was staying in the province. He came to Constantinople for various business.

Learning of Acachie's arrival, John Golden Mouth asked him to be his guest in the episcopal palace. John explained to Acachie that there were countless rooms in the palace and that it wouldn't be right for him to stay anywhere else. The old bishop was happy about this invitation. For him it was something he had never dreamed of. He, Acachie, bishop of the province, to be housed in the great palace of the bishop of Constantinople. This honor overwhelmed him and he very happily accepted John's invitation. Acachie would have been as successful as he would've been if he had said that he had been the emperor's guest, by telling on his return that he had lived at Constantinople in the bishop's palace itself. So he accepted the invitation.

He was led to his chamber in the palace. It was a room exactly like John's, with a plank bed, a blanket and bare walls. Acachie was stunned and thought that his friend, John, was making fun of him. He expected to be invited into a carpeted bedroom with a soft bed and servants. This was how it was normal for a bishop's friends' room to be.

Acachie thought he had been offered the guest room for sleeping. Only a visiting room could be so sordid. Acachie immediately left the episcopal palace. From that moment, he became John's mortal enemy. In vain was it explained to him that the bishop of Constantinople slept in a similar room. Acachie couldn't believe it. From that day until the end of his life, Acachie will seek to avenge this humiliation.

At the same time as him (Acachie), other people from high society were irritated, considering it an offense that the new bishop never invited anyone. They began to peddle (to rumor) various legends... about John Golden Mouth it was said that he made orgy. Others said that the saint had a defect, an infirmity, and that he ate in such a vile way that he couldn't do it in public. All these rumors were communicated to John Chrysostom by his deacon, Serapion, the bishop's administrator. The saint wasn't angry. A saint is stronger than slander. He lived an austere life to please God. He took care of people's souls and had no time to waste in receptions. The fact that the aristocracy was dissatisfied didn't bother him. He knew that he couldn't please people and, at the same time, God. He wanted to be the faithful servant of the Lord and not the servant of men. So he continued to live in the episcopal palace like in a cave: with vegetables, water, solitude and prayers.

The empress' piety

Emperor Arcadius continued to persecute the heretics as his father had advised him on his deathbed. The Arians were especially persecuted. The persecution against the Arians reached such an intensity that everything related to them and Arius, the founder of the sect, was destroyed.

During this era, all the houses of prayer of the Arians were confiscated. And they no longer had a place for prayer. They could no longer meet even on the street, because they had no right to stay, nor to hold meetings within the city. The Arians then proceeded as other strikers proceeded. Since they didn't have the right to stay, they walked and prayed on the go. Every evening, in columns, they circulated through the streets, celebrated the liturgy while walking. These marching Arian liturgies lasted all night. Each priest brought his faithful after him and officiated walking along the streets.

Faithful to the testament left by Teodosie, the emperor wanted to ban even this mobile liturgy, but John objected. But with the help of his believers, he organized nocturnal processions similar to the Arian processions. In a short time he organized more impressive processions. Every evening the Christians of Constantinople, carrying lighted candles, met at the processions of John Chrysostom in columns that paraded, circulated, through the city streets. But this required hundreds of thousands of candles every night. Eudoxia offered candles from her own money for all the faithful who followed these processions. Moreover, dressed in black like a nun, wearing the diadem of an empress, Eudoxia walked on foot in the religious procession, holding a lighted candle in her hand, alongside the people.

Such a thing seemed unimaginable at the time. John himself was impressed by the virtuous conduct of Empress Eudoxia. In September, in the first year of his episcopate, John organized a similar procession at the church in Drypia, close to the capital, where martyrs were buried. The procession started in Constantinople at midnight. Eudoxia was on foot at the head of the procession. Also present were all the courtiers, all the slaves, all the citizens of Constantinople, all the aristocrats, all equal before God. John was emotional. Arriving at the church of the martyrs, he told Eudoxia in his homily:

„Like you, Mary used to lead the people of God, carrying Joseph's bones into the promised land amid shouts of joy, songs and hymns... Mary carried sound instruments in her hand, and you carry a heart that knows how to hear a softer and more beautiful harmony... Mary celebrated the liberation of the Jews, you give a crown to the Church... You are great, queen!".

Eudoxia started to trust John very much. She built churches by drawing the plans with her own hand. She built asylums for the elderly and the poor. The only concern of the young blonde and beautiful empress was the Church. The man she listened to and respected the most was John. All her money went to the Church, to the poor, to the sick. John was right to call Eudoxia the mother of the Church. He eulogized her in public. He admired the Christian beauty of the empress Eudoxia.

Against suspicious cohabitations

Since the arrival of John Chrysostom, the bishop's palace in Constantinople had been turned into a monastery. The saint had found in the courtyard huge blocks of rare marble that Nectarius had ordered from afar, paying very dearly for them, to decorate the episcopal palace. John sold them, as usual giving the money from the sale to the poor.

The proletariat (poor people) of Constantinople had for the first time found a defender and a protector. Every time the proletariat finds a protector, it quickly loses him. Defenders of the poor are always considered dangerous and are suppressed by the authorities. This time, the defender of the poor was the bishop himself, a man who couldn't be accused of disturbing the public order, as protectors and tribunes of the poor masses are usually accused. Moreover, John was the empress' friend. He was an official figure. The poor and disinherited respected him.

In the meantime, John Chrysostom ended up evacuating everything that didn't please God from the episcopal palace. Then he checked the clergy. Many priests, bishops or deacons had a woman in their house who did their housekeeping. In the West, these women who lived with the clergy were called „mulieres subintroductae" or „under-introduced women". In the East they had a more beautiful name, agapete, agape being the love of God in opposition to eros, which is earthly love. The priest would take an orphan or a young girl who wanted to devote herself to the Church, declare her an Agape sister and keep her as a housekeeper all her life. John didn't like this common life of monks and young girls. He was convinced that God didn't love this cohabitation, no matter how chaste it was. Life in the same house with a woman was already a pleasure. It was unhealthy for a monk to have a young woman around him all the time.

„In my opinion, life together with a woman is not devoid of pleasure, pleasure even outside the conjugal union and any bodily relations”.

„Having no hindrance, union with a legitimate woman scatters desires; it often even breeds disgust and puts an end to beginnings”.

A legitimate woman has children, is sometimes sick, grows old and the infirmities resulting from childbirth „quickly wither the flower of youth, break the boldness of pleasure. The virgin is not subject to any of this; she has neither carnal relationships that depress and kill the forces of nature, nor sufferings, nor the exhaustion of motherhood that hastens wrinkles, she is seen retaining her youthful vigor for a long time. He, who touches the body of a maiden, is more troubled by contact than by sight”.

John tries to convince the monks that this cohabitation is sinful: „Our age has seen many men who bound their bodies with chains, covered themselves with sackcloth, retired to the tops of mountains; they lived in unceasing vigils and fasts, setting an example of the severest discipline, rigorously forbidding any woman to cross the threshold of their poor roof, and, with all these rigors exercised upon themselves, they could hardly repulse the fury of passion”. (Against suspicious cohabitations. First speech)

Besides the sin, there is also the scandal caused apart from these cohabitations. John Chrysostom therefore forbade all bishops, priests, deacons, all the clergy of his diocese to have women in their homes.

This bishop's decision triggered a storm of protests. The monks and virgins became the fierce enemies of the bishop who "forbade their common life". But John wasn't intimidated. He knew that these cohabitations do not please God and harm the Church. He said that if he tolerated such illegitimate cohabitations, he himself, the bishop, would be guilty of the same sin as the pimps.

John Chrysostom ordered these virgins to immediately leave the priests' residences. He advised them to marry if they wanted to live with a man, cohabitation with priests being more reprehensible than the conduct of prostitutes. The priest is an athlete of Christ.

„Saint Paul said: «Don't be people's slaves» I will tell you: stop being slaves to women who take you with them to perdition. Christ wants His army to recruit watchful soldiers, vigorous athletes whom the fight leaves them standing, and He has not armed us with spiritual weapons so that we live as servants of vile girls, among wool and spindles" (Against suspicious cohabitations).

The holy bishop was severe, irreducible. He removed from the Church all the bishops and priests who didn't obey the order to dismiss these young girls. John's first army of enemies was already formed. But the saint didn't back down. He knew that he displeased the clergy, but that he pleased God and cleansed the Church of Christ.

Crime for crime's sake

Now, the episcopal palace was clean of everything that didn't please God. The priests' houses were also clean. It was now the turn of the church where John officiated. John spoke in front of the royal doors or among the faithful in order to be closer to the people. His voice was not very strong. Because of this he preferred to be as close as possible to the auditorium.

Right in front of him, while he was preaching, was a group of ladies of the palace who belonged to the aristocracy. At its head, were three friends of the empress whose names were Marsa, Castricia and Eugrafia. Every time he saw these women at church, John had the impression that they were offending God and the Church. Especially Eugrafia, who was the oldest of the three women. John's biographer says that Eugrafia used to make up like an egyptian idol. She violently dyed her eyelashes and eyebrows, put on make-up and wore extravagant toiletries.

In that era, fashion demanded a hairstyle that brought hair to the top of the head, so that it covered the forehead from one temple tothe other. Not long ago, this hairstyle was worn only by prostitutes. John couldn't see these aristocrats without remembering the fact that they had silver night dishes in their homes.

He looked into their eyes and said: „What value do you think your excrements have to collect them in silverware?”. And his voice became energetic: „Listen carefully. I no longer advice, I command imperatively. You are at liberty to obey or not. If you persist in this error, I will not tolerate it, and I will forbid you to enter this church. The The pagans mock us and consider our religion a myth. I therefore command you to get rid of these ornaments, these night-pots, and give their price to the poor, stop persevering in this folly. Stand against me, protest against me, I will not give up in front of anyone. When I will be judged in front of Christ, will you be there to defend me? How so then? So many poor people come to church and the church has so many rich people incapable to help them? One is rich, the other one is starving to death. One is taking a dump in his night silverware, while other is starving and has no bread. Madness! Cruelty!”.

And John looked at Eugrafia painted like an egyptian idol and adorned with the new hairstyle of prostitutes. According to Palladius, John told her: „Why do you force your body to rejuvenate when it cannot do it? You bring curls of hair over your forehead after the fashion of prostitutes to deceive those who see you, but, believe me, by doing so you only recognize your wrinkles”.

Looking at their low-cut necklines, he said that women who arouse men on the street, at the palace, are criminals. These women need to stop showing their cleavage. Because it's an attack against the men who watch them. „I see in your attack a terrible and vile thing that doesn't even involve the crime of the poisoner or the murderer. For the murderer and the poisoner destroy only the body of their fellow, while these women destroy his soul. You bring death for the image of God”.

Moreover, an assassin kills with some intention: to take revenge, to steal, while women, who arouse men through their cleavages, commit a free evil deed, without any profit. They commit a crime for the sake of crime.

John says: „My word, I know well, offends many susceptibilities. But there's nothing I can do. It's about God's commands. I didn't speak like a commanding master, but sad and sorrowful. Forgive me, I don't want to be impolite in speaking of these things, but I am forced to do so".

The high society and especially Eugrafia and the ladies of a certain age to whom he told that they adorn themselves for nothing, that they will forever be old, didn't forgive him this truth. In John's army of enemies, along with the priests and agape virgins, the elegant women of Constantinople also enlisted. They considered themselves offended and wanted to take revenge. Especially Eugraphia, whom the saint looked in the eyes when he asked her: „Why do you want to rejuvenate your body, although you know that this is impossible? The more you try, the more your wrinkles are visible".

Misused wealth

With the same tenacity with which he emptied the episcopal palace of its luxurious furniture, John wanted to eradicate sin from Constantinopolitan society as well. „The rich, he says, constantly upset the Lord". John said that the rich are thieves. „Holy Scripture teaches us: we don't steal only when we take something from the other; we also steal when we don't share what we have".

A rich man is like a wild beast. „The rich man has nothing if he doesn't have everything; a rich man is not human, his very face shows his beastly nature. Even beasts are less ruthless, their nails tear less" says John.

John knows that he has triggered a big scandal by attacking the rich. He said, „Many accuse me of always attacking the rich, but I only do it because they always attack the poor. Yes, I attack the rich, or rather not the rich, but those who misuse their wealth!".

„The rich are my children, but the poor are also my children". He told them that he wanted to save them: „I tear you out of greed, I make you likeable to everyone and I assure you the kingdom of heaven. I love you... Who else will tell you about your sin? I want your salvation, I am your doctor. I fear only one thing: sin".

After this homily, the rich stopped coming to church. They also allied themselves with the agape virgins, with the elegant women and with the priests of Constantinople against the saint. But the saint had only one fear: sin. The hostility of priests, the rich, elegant women and virgins didn't frighten him. A saint is a man without fear. A saint fears nothing but sin.

Eutropius

John wanted to save all people from sin, regardless of social class. Among those who lived in sin, was Eutropius, the prime minister of Arcadius. Eutropius was the real master of the empire, because the emperor was always sleepy. Eutropius took care of everything. He called John Chrysostom from Antioch and made him bishop.

John Goldenmouth felt immense pity for Eutropius. The eunuch had lost his soul. And John knew that his duty was to save people's souls. So he went to Eutropius to save him from sin. Eutropius, the ruler of the Eastern Roman Empire, was a wretch who had already lost his earthly life. The saint wanted to save at least the soul of the eunuch. A saint is a man who fights passionately against sin. John said: „I don't want to be saved and you to be lost. Ah! if I could show you my love for you, you would no longer reproach me for speaking harshly to you. Nothing is dearer to me than you, not even the light".

Therefore, John went to Eutropius, the prime minister of emperor Arcadius, and told him that he wanted to save him. Eutropius was an old man. The biography of this eunuch is painful. He was born on the banks of the Euphrates. Shortly after his birth, his parents castrated him because a castrated boy was more expensive than a normal boy and they wanted to get the best price for him.

Claudian speaks of Eutropius as follows: „Struck from the cradle to the most cruel tortures of mutilation. Then dragged from one market to another... An object of traffic, he is exposed in the public markets and always changes his house. Who could enumerate the names of so many masters?" (Claudian, Eutropius. First Book).

Eutropius' first known master was a soldier named Ptolemy. After some time, the soldier sold him to a general. As Claudian says, Eutropius suffered when the soldier sold him. „How many tears did this separation cost him!”. Then Eutropius was bought by a consul. The consul gave him as a present to his daughter on the occasion of her marriage. Here „he combed the mistress's hair and brought her the water needed for the toilet in a silver bowl”. When his mistress left the bathroom, Eutropius freshened the air around her with a fan.

Meanwhile he grew old. His mistress could no longer use him. But because no one wanted to buy Eutropius because of his age, the mistress gave him back his freedom. An old slave is a useless. Eutropius eventually entered the service of a court general named Abundantius. Emperor Theodosius had the opportunity to speak to the eunuch when he was in the service of the general and was amazed by Eutropius' intelligence, tact and ability. Every time he needed wise advice, Theodosius asked Eutropius for it. In a short time, Eutropius became the great emperor's private adviser. Theodosius entrusted the eunuch with a series of delicate missions and Eutropius fulfilled them perfectly. Upon the death of Theodosius, Eutropius became Arcadius' adviser and accompanied him to Constantinople. After the assassination of Rufinus, the emperor's youthful tutor, Eutropius became Arcadius' sole advisor. He made him marry the beautiful Eudoxia.

Because the emperor was sleepy, the empire was ruled by Eutropius all the time. The former slave had become the general governor of the Eastern Roman Empire. Everyone was subject to Eutropius, including the emperor and empress. He had a sister, a former slave too, whom he loved like the apple of his eye. The eunuch was a Christian. However, since he became prime minister, his life was hell. The people couldn't forgive Eutropius that he had been a slave and had risen so high.

Four hundred years had passed since the birth of Jesus Christ, and yet people were not yet quite convinced that they were all equal; a slave was considered a being in chains. The fact that Eutropius didn't wear chains was an injustice in their eyes. „Hands made to wear chains, dare to wave the consul's scepter”, writes the poet Claudian.

But Eutropius lost his patience. One day, he condemned one of his enemies, General Tomasius. After which the convictions continued with no interruption. General Tomasius was the mastermind of a plot against Eutropius. He was deported to an oasis. The other conspirators took refuge in the church. Churches were holy places. No one could be arrested if they took refuge there. When he saw that his enemies escaped unpunished, Eutropius issued, on September 4, 397, a law by which he forbade churches to give asylum to people wanted by justice. This law alarmed the whole empire. Hatred against Eutropius was unleashed. In turn, Eutropius responded to the hatred by completely losing his mind. Until that day, he condemned, so to speak, from the shadows. Now he no longer wanted to remain the slave counselor. He wanted to show off: he started getting all kinds of titles and ordering all possible uniforms.

Eutropius dressed the uniform of a general. He put on a magistrate's robe. He put on the consul's toga. If he could, he would have dressed them all at the same time to get revenge. From the revolt, he began to collect gold. All kinds of riches. He was tyrannical. According to the opinion of the holy bishop John Chrysostom, Eutropius lived in sin up to his neck. And then the saint, in his immense love for people, went to Eutropius to save him from sin. John showed him all the injustices he had committed. The saint defended the victims.

Moreover, John Golden Mouth couldn't tolerate that Eutropius had attacked the Church by abolishing its right of asylum for those who came to ask for protection at the altar. John couldn't bear this especially. No one has the right to attack the Church. Not even tyrants. He was a bishop and had to defend the Church. At any risk. And, in his role as head and defender of the Church, John Chrysostom sacrificed his peace and entered into battle with Eutropius, who had attacked it.

The Church's right of asylum

The Church's right of asylum is one of the oldest rights that existed on earth, before there were laws, when they were in danger, people sought refuge in the the temples. In the course of history, the army and the police resorted to various stratagems to kill the refugees in the temples. Sometimes they would make holes in the roofs and through these holes they would shoot inside with the bow. They believed that in this way they were not violating the temple. Other times, also out of concern not to violate the temple, they built shut the gates and those who were locked inside died of hunger and thirst. The Romans put a strict guard at the temple gates and prevented people from entering. There were temples in Rome where it was impossible to enter, especially during the revolutions, because of well guarded entrances.

Another law obliged the priests and monks to pay the debts of the one who took refuge in the church, in case he was pursued by the tax authorities. Two edicts of Eutropius forbade churches to host those who were guilty of treason. That is, those who were plotting against him. Therefore, John the Golden Mouth began the fight against Eutropius. John had empress Eudoxia as a powerful ally, she supported him in his fight against Eutropius.

Eudoxia versus Eutropius

Eudoxia turned against Eutropius, but not for the same reasons as John Chrysostom. Eudoxia was not irritated by the fact that Eutropius had robbed the churches of the right of asylum, but the pretext was welcome to start the fight against the eunuch. As soon as she learned that John had begun the fight against the minister, Eudoxia was on his side.

Eutropius married her to Arcadius and made her empress. It was true. But Eudoxia was a proud woman, she still couldn't have endured Eutropius commanding her as a subordinate. For, although empress, she had to execute Eutropius' orders. Even the emperor did nothing but what Eutropius said. Eudoxia wanted to get rid of the eunuch... To remain free in the palace.

With the help of John Chrysostom, Eudoxia hoped to deal the eunuch a fatal blow, to throw him out of the palace.

Tribigild versus Eutropius

In the spring of 399, a leader of the Goths named Tribigild came to Constantinople. No one suspected upon the arrival of this young Goth that he would play an important part in the downfall of Eutropius. Tribigild's situation was the same as that of Empress Eudoxia's father. They were both from the same family. Both were German. Tired of the war, the Goths had stopped attacking the Roman Empire. After some time they were engaged to defend the empire that they had not been able to conquer. The empire gave them lands, gave them ranks, weapons and salaries.

Tribigild, now arrived from Phrygia, was coming to ask the emperor for an increase in pay for the Goths who were under his command. He wanted to speak to the emperor personally, but Arcadius didn't deal with the empire. Eutropius was in charge of the state. Tribigild therefore requested an audience with Eutropius. The eunuch postponed the audience of the Goth leader and left him in the antechamber for days on end, to humiliate him. Tribigild felt very offended seeing that the eunuch kept him waiting for days. At last, Eutropius received Tribigild who was young and proud, but Eutropius refused all his requests and moreover humiliated him by speaking to him in an insulting manner.

Tribigild was veryoffended and went to one of his relatives, a Gothic general named Gainas who commanded the militia in Constantinople. Gainas told him that he wasn't the only man offended by Eutropius. Empress Eudoxia, the Church and John Chrysostom had also been offended. Gainas himself was constantly offended by Eutropius who had left him in a secondary position. The entire aristocracy was offended by the eunuch, the whole army and the whole empire.

Gainas saw only one solution to wash away the shame: the death of Eutropius.

The two Goth leaders, Tribigild and Gainas, therefore agreed to take revenge. They knew they could count on Eudoxia and on everyone. Returned to Phrygia, Tribigild told his Goths how he, their leader, had been insulted in Constantinople by a eunuch. Hearing what offenses had been done to her husband in the imperial palace, Tribigild's wife tore out her hair in rage. All the Goths were furious. They started the riot. In a few days the whole of Phrygia was in flames. The Goths were about to start a war with the Eastern Roman Empire and were advancing towards Constantinople. Eutropius had to stop them.

Gainas and Arcadius against Eutropius

Eutropius had to send the army against Tribigild and the revolted Goths. But the imperial army was composed of Goths and commanded by Goths. Eutropius was therefore obliged to send the Goths to fight with their brothers. After much searching, Eutropius found a general who was not a Goth. His name was Leon. Eutropius sent the general Leon against Tribigild. The army commanded by Leon was quickly crushed, and Leon was killed in battle. The Goths advanced victoriously towards Constantinople. To stop them, Eutropius had to send this time a Goth general, named Gainas. He was the only general capable of this.

Besides the fact that Gainas was a Goth, like Tribigild against whom he had to fight, he was also Tribigild's friend. Moreover, they were relatives and had agreed to get rid of Eutropius. It was hard to imagine that Gainas would fight against Tribigild to save Eutropius and the empire. Gainas and his Gothic army set up camp in the region of Constantinople. Tribigild and his people then arrived in the same region. Instead of fighting, Gainas made an alliance with Tribigild. He informed Eutropius that Tribigild's army was too strong and he couldn't stop it. Eutropius would've liked to send more troops, but he had none. Then Eutropius tried to negotiate with Tribigild, the young Goth chieftain. Eutropius asked him what he wanted and promised him that this time his wishes would be taken into account. In agreement with Gainas, Tribigild replied that he wanted no more money, no extra pay for his men, no new privileges, but only one thing: the head of Eutropius who had humiliated him. That was all... The head of the minister. Tribigild threatened that if he didn't receive satisfaction, he would destroy Constantinople.

During this time the Goths were advancing. They were at the city gates. The situation was serious. The emperor didn't know what to do. He never knew anything. And, as usual, Arcadius turned to Eutropius asking what he should do. The Goths demanded the head of Eutropius. The emperor asked Eutropius if he should cut off his head and send him to the Goths. The emperor wanted the advice of a friend. He had always asked Eutropius for advice, and this time he did the same.

Eutropius couldn't make up his mind in this alternative: to let his head be cut off or to sacrifice Constantinople. He retired to another room of the palace to meditate. It was a difficult situation to resolve. On the way, he met Eudoxia, who was in the emperor's antechamber. Empress Eudoxia was frightened, all the citizens of Constantinople were frightened. The Goths were at the gates of the city and could break in at any moment. The situation had alarmed the empress. She knew that only the beheading of Eutropius could save the city.

The empress openly told the eunuch to let his head be cut off so that it could be sent to the Goths to save Constantinople. Eutropius seized the empress by the hand violently and said: „Take heed, Eudoxia, the hand that brought you into this palace is still strong enough to drive you away" (Philostrogius, cf. A. Thierry).

Eudoxia burst into tears. She took her children in her arms, Flacillia who was three years old and Pulheria who was five months old. The children were crying. Eudoxia was crying. Holding her children in her arms, she entered her sleepy husband's office. At the cries of the children and Eudoxia, the emperor Arcadius understood that Eudoxia was offended and was now coming to him to ask the head of the eunuch. Not only the Goths, the empress also wanted this head. The emperor ordered the confiscation of all Eutropius' uniforms, titles and possessions. The order hadn't yet been drawn up, for the imperial servants had already gone in search of Eutropius to behead him. But Eutropius was a clever man. He managed to leave the palace in disguise on the service stairs.

Eudoxia, hastened the police, the guards, the servants to bring Eutropius in chains. But Eutropius was already in the cathedral of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, kneeling before the altar and asking for the protection of the holy bishop John the Golden Mouth. John reminded him that he had canceled, through two decrees, the asylum rights of the churches. The persecuted and pursued could no longer take refuge in the church because of the laws he himself had given. Eutropius was desperate. By these laws he himself had closed the way to his salvation. Like any saint, John Chrysostom first of all respected the eternal laws. He encouraged Eutropius. Just as people in trouble should be encouraged. John Golden Mouth promised him that the Church would protect him, although Eutropius had forbidden the Church to protect those in pain. The saint told the eunuch that the greatest glory of the Church was when the persecutors came to ask for its protection.

Meanwhile, the priests gathered around the saint and asked him to hand over Eutropius. The deacons, the bishops, the deaconesses, all considered the protection granted to Eutropius, the enemy of the Church, a sacrilege. Saint Sophia was surrounded by the army and the police. The population of Constantinople was gathered around the church, demanding the head of Eutropius and protesting against John the Golden Mouth who was harboring the tyrant. Bishop John came out at the threshold of the church, in front of the crowd and the soldiers. He said that, independent of the laws that could be promulgated by ministers, the church was and always remained a place of sacred asylum. The bishop had the duty to defend the church and his right to asylum. No one could enter here, John told them, except by passing over his corpse. As long as he is alive, he will not allow anyone to touch the one who had sought refuge in the church.

The soldiers replied that they had orders to take out Eutropius, the enemy of the Church. John blocked the way for the soldiers. He repeated to them that the Church was the body of Christ and a bishop had to defend it. But St. John the Golden Mouth was a small and frail man, his body dry from fasting and prayers. The soldiers were young and athletic people. Any soldier could've lifted John with one hand, but the saint was determined to defend his church, no matter how weak he was. And because he couldn't resist in any other way, and the soldiers wanted to enter, John opened his coat on his chest and asked to be killed before entering the church. The soldiers and the crowd stopped. The bishop asked them to be conducted to the emperor and to be allowed to speak to Arcadius in person. The soldiers framed the saint between their lances as a criminal and led him to the emperor.

The escape

Before leaving, the bishop locked the church with the key. He then allowed himself to be pushed by the soldiers and to be escorted by swords like an assassin through the streets of Constantinople to the imperial palace. At the sight of this spectacle, the crowd forgot about Eutropius and everyone followed the procession of the holy prisoner to the palace.

Arcadius received John Chrysostom on the spot. The saint simply said that the church enjoyed immunity through a sacred right, and that by virtue of this divine right it could grant asylum to Eutropius. The church could accommodate all the people who took refuge in it, pursued by human justice.

Arcadius wanted to discuss theology with John Chrysostom, but he was too irritated! He recalled the offenses brought by Eutropius to the noble empress. He said that Eutropius couldn't take refuge in a church since he himself had abolished her right to asylum. John argued saying that the glory of the Church was to host even her enemies. The emperor didn't know what to answer. And he started to cry: he was crying because he didn't know what to do.

During this time, the crowd gathered under the walls of the imperial palace was agitated. The crowd and the soldiers demanded in chorus the head of Eutropius. Emperor Arcadius made an effort and stepped out onto the balcony to address the seething crowd beneath the palace windows. The emperor wasn't an orator. The crowd roared wildly and demanded the death of Eutropius.

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Everything is vanity

The day after these events was a Sunday. The church was full. Not a single citizen of Constantinople remained at home. Everyone was at church. They all wanted to hear news about Eutropius and listen to John Goldenmouth. Even on Easter, John said, there weren't so many people at the church. They had all come to hear news of the great event that had just taken place. The most powerful man in the empire had fallen, he was hiding in the church.

John had defended the eunuch with the price of his life and continued to protect him. John had stood alone against the soldiers, the crowd and the emperor. John Golden Mouth was like David, because he had defeated the army and the crowd alone. It was a spectacular record. John's courage amazed the people. He says it himself: „The traps don't make me tremble... no one should blame me as being wrong and the whole world to start a war against me. Because such a war would only bring honor to me. This is the principle I want to teach you. Don't be afraid of the strong man's rage, fear only the tyranny of sin. People cannot harm you. Only you can harm yourselves".

When the bishop appeared to deliver his sermon, there was a solemn silence. The events of the eve had been very unpleasant. Most of them believed that he shouldn't protect Eutropius.

John knew that the crowd wanted revenge and disapproved of her behavior. He waved. The auditors were watching him. Before he had uttered the first word, the curtain that hid the sanctuary rose as in a theater, and Eutropius appeared beside the altar as on a stage. He was kneeling, his head covered with ashes, dressed in the rags with which he had disguised himself when he fled the palace. The eunuch's teeth were chattering in fear and his eyes were horrified at the sight of the crowd a few steps away from him. It was a spectacle that no one had foreseen. The emotion was maximum. Taking advantage of this emotion, John Chrysostom addressed the entire population of Constantinople before him, in front of Eutropius: „In these moments we are permitted to say with the wise: Vanity of vanities, all are vanity" (Solomon, Ecclesiastul).

Pointing to the wretched man who was kneeling, overwhelmed, terrified before the crowd, John Goldenmouth asked Eutropius: „Where are now the splendors of consular power? Where is the light of lamps and torches? Where are the applause and the choirs, the dances, the feasts and the joyous gatherings?

Where are the tables laden with meat, the wine drunk for days at a time, the refined dishes, the subtle language of the servants of power? All these have passed away".

Turning to Eutropius, John Chrysostom said: „Didn't I tell you over and over that wealth is fleeting? You didn't listen to me. Didn't I tell you: is he like ungrateful servants, who think only of escaping? You didn't want to believe me. And yet experience has shown you that it's not only a fugitive and ungrateful thing, but also deadly, because it makes you pale and trembling. You fought against the Church, and the Church opened her arms to receive you. The church you persecuted has only one concern today: to reach out to you in trouble and save you".

And addressing the crowds, John the Golden Mouth said: „Who was greater than this man? No one in all the world could say that he had his wealth. No honor was lacking to him, and behold, he has come to be more wretched than the captive in chains, more empty than the slave, poorer than the hungry beggars. He has before him now only drawn swords, executioners, fearful tortures. Before him ceaselessly lies torment in all its forms, death with all its horrors".

John also told the believers to flee from Eutropius' sins and let him serve as an example to them. John Goldilocks maintained with all his energy his determination t o continue to defend Eutropius. „Did he attack the Church? Yes, but he took refuge in it. Is there a more resounding triumph than the presence of this culprit in this precinct? Let us respect Eutropius in his asylum. He is here the most beautiful ornament of the altar. He himself closed this asylum and abrogated by his own law the pardon which he now begs. No doubt, but by his very deed, he strengthens the inviolability of this asylum".

After the last words, the curtain fell on Eutropius. The crowd left the Saint Sophia church, devastated as if after a very emotional show.

The safety of the Church

John Chrysostom kept Eutropius in the church under his protection for three days. Neither the emperor, nor the army, nor the crowd dared to tear him from there.

This fact was a great victory for John. But one person couldn't give up revenge. It was Eudoxia. Eudoxia could no longer live unless she brought down the head of Eutropius who had humiliated her. She sent imperial emissaries to the church who swore to Eutropius that they would spare his life. Eutropius believed them. He ran away from John's church.

As soon as he left the church premises, however, he was arrested, put in chains and deported to Cyprus. John announced his believers that if Eutropius had not left the church, he wouldn't have been arrested. He who leaves the Church of Jesus is always in danger, in very great danger. People are safe only inside the church.

The justice

The emperor didn't want to kill Eutropius because he had sworn to spare his life. And he didn't want to break his oath. Eudoxia found a magistrate named Aurelian, who began to instruct the eunuch's trial. Eutropius was to be forgiven for all the crimes he had committed, as the emperor had sworn. But at the same time he had to be condemned, in order to please the empress.

Eutropius was forgiven for all the crimes he had committed throughout his life. He was forgiven for insulting the empress. He was forgiven for robberies, for abuse of trust, for torture, for assassinations, for corruption. As promised. He was forgiven for everything.

During the investigation, Aurelian, the prefect of the praetorium, discovered a portrait of Eutropius taken on the day the eunuch had been installed in his consulship. The magistrate's eye was looking for a new crime for which the emperor had not granted him pardon because he did not know it. So the magistrate searched for the crime in the portrait of the eunuch. Under the consular uniform he found mixed with other emblems worn by Eutropius an emblem that didn't appear on the official consul uniform. It was an emblem, a star, or perhaps a jewel that the tail or who made the consul's uniform had caught among the other ornaments either through carelessness or ignorance. But the emperor alone had the right to wear that tiny emblem. Anyone, other than him who would have worn, was guilty of treason. And the punishment was death. Eutropius therefore lost his head for a thread, for an emblem, for a button that he had worn one day on a coat; maybe even without knowing that he was wearing it. Eutropius was beheaded because of this clothing ornament. Because all his other crimes were forgiven.

The example

John was very upset. He suffered not so much because Eutropius had been beheaded, although he had been promised that his life would be spared, nor because Eudoxia was vengeful. The saint experienced immense suffering because the example of Eutropius had served the believers nothing.

None of the Christians had changed their way of life according to this example. And this saddened John beyond measure. Not only did John Chrysostom's parishioners become no better after the fall of Eutropius, but they did exactly what Eutropius had done. For example, all those who had the opportunity pounced like jackals on the fortune of Eutropius. Everyone wanted to catch some thing. The example of the eunuch had been of no avail. The faithful wanted to get rich just as the eunuch wanted.

Chapter 6

The sacrifice

Eutropius was beheaded in Colchis. His statues were broken. His possessions were confiscated. But the abuse of power and injustice didn't disappear with him. Arcadius continued his life as a sleepy emperor. It was Eudoxia who replaced Eutropius as the emperor's adviser.

The blonde empress took care of all the problems of the empire, seconded by three close friends: Eugrafia (whom John had told to stop making unnecessary efforts to rejuvenate), Castricia and Marcia. History speaks nothing but bad about these three friends of empress Eudoxia. They had amassed fabulous fortunes, practiced influence peddling and no one could stand against them. They ruled the empire together with Eudoxia.

The three women, like the empress, had their assistants. Eudoxia had John the Comite, the empress's affair lover. Then there was Aurelian, the magistrate who had condemned Eutropius and whose skill was distorting and applying the paragraphs of the law. which the three ladies and the empress admired him for. Finally, Saturninus, Castricia's husband, was part of the team that ran the empire.

Only one man openly opposed the palace team: bishop John. He asked the empress and her ladies to be virtuous, as he also asked all Christians. This invitation to virtue didn't please the noble ladies.

Second thing, which disturbed the empire led by Eudoxia, were the Goths. Tribigild and Gainas set up camp in a suburb on the outskirts of Constantinople and every night threatened the capital with destruction. The emperor tried to deal with them. He had no army to defeat them. So he had to negotiate with the Goths. Tribigild and Gainas replied that they agreed to deal with the emperor, but with him personally. But at the palace everything was run by women and their three secretaries.

In order to be able to talk quietly with the emperor, from man to man, the Goths asked first to be sent to them the three proteges of the women from the palace: Aurelian, Saturninus and the comites John, with whom they were free to do as they pleased. The emperor didn't know what answer to give to the Goths. Eutropius was no longer there to give him advice. Arcadius therefore asked Eudoxia, who had taken the place of Eutropius. For nothing in the world would Eudoxia have agreed to part with John, her lover. But the Goths threatened to enter Constantinople if they were refused the surrender of the three dignitaries. Eudoxia prepared a negative answer for the Goths. She was willing to fight, even if that fight would result in the destruction of Constantinople, rather than hand over her lover. Eudoxia took the negative answer to her husband for him to sign but it was already too late. Doing an act of chivalry, the three men took a boat and set off in the night to the barbarians to surrender and thus save Constantinople from invasion. They preferred to surrender willingly to the barbarians, to offer themselves to torture to save the empire.

The talks

Gainas and Tribigild received the three aristocrats as expected. First, they ordered them to undress and appear completely naked before the Goth leaders. They put them in chains. After that, they called the executioner and ordered the aristocrats to put their heads on the stump to be cut off with the axe. But when the ax reached the prisoner's neck and gave him chills, the executioner lifted the ax. And it started again. And the Goth leaders amused themselves by beheading them without beheading the three prisoners, doing this dozens of times. Because the prisoners felt the thrill of death every time the ax came over their heads. These beheadings suspended at the last second, lasted several days.

When John the Golden Mouth found out what was happening in the Goth camp, he got into the boat and went to the barbarians. He went alone to deal with them. A saint is not afraid of barbarians. He asked Gainas to stop torturing the three prisoners because it wasn't a worthy thing for a man to do. Gainas was impressed by the courage of this bishop who came to the enemy camp without fear and who spoke to the Goth leader as an equal.

Gainas spared the lives of the three captives. He exiled them. After which the Goths asked the emperor in person to come to their camp to negotiate. John the Golden Mouth took the emperor with him and went together to the Goths. The bishop witnessed all the negotiations. The Goths demanded the supreme leadership of the imperial army from the emperor. In return they promised to behave like disciplined soldiers and defend the empire. After these agreements, the Goths entered Constantinople as defenders of the city, not as invaders. It was a new victory for John who had saved his faithful from the barbarian assault.

For John, however, the event was a secondary one. He primarily wanted to save people from sin. And this salvation could only come through the Church. He was the athlete who fought for her and defended her.

The barbarians, however, dared to attack the Church. The Goths had been accepted and allowed to settle in the Roman empire on the condition that they become Christians. At that time, however, the emperor of Rome was an Arian. At the very begining, entering the empire, the Goths therefore became Arians. In time, another emperor followed. The emperor's religion was the official religion of the empire. The new emperor, however, was orthodox and asked the Goths to abjure Arianism and embrace orthodoxy; therefore to receive the imperial religion as is the duty of every good soldier and good citizen. But the Goths refused. They didn't do it for doctrinal reasons. They had their logic: it was ridiculous, they said, to change your religion with each new emperor in order to always have the same religion with this one. Religion was a matter for them that they took very seriously. And the Goths remained Aryan. And now, that the entire army of the Eastern Roman Empire was composed of Goths, they demanded the right to have Arian churches. The emperor replied to Gainas that this matter should be discussed with John Goldenmouth. The bishop got upset. He was the defender of the Church. And he couldn't open heretical churches in his city.

For the holy bishop, the Church was one: the one founded by the apostles. All the rest was heresy. So the Arians were heretics. He couldn't let them invade the true Church, the Church of the apostles, because his mission as a bishop was to defend his Church even at the cost of his life. This time, Gainas had in front of him a real warrior, determined not to give in and defend his Church. To defend it against sin, against the heresy of the Arians, against all dangers. John Chrysostom's boldness made Gainas stop asking for churches for the Arians.

John Golden Mouth spoke to the Goths, who had become orthodox in their language, in their church, through an interpreter (translator). But the Goths had other more serious concerns. They were in full decay. Tribigild had just died. Another Goth, Praviha, proposed to the emperor to attack his fellow citizens from behind and drive them out of the capital. The armed population of Praviha and the imperial guards massacred in one night all the Goths of Gainas who were in Constantinople. Gainas fled to today's Romanian Carpathians, where he was killed by the Huns. His head on the tip of a spear was sent as a gift to Eudoxia. The Huns knew that this gift would please the empress. Gainas was one of those who had tortured his lover, Count John.

Chapter 7

Iniquities in the Church of Ephesus

John the Golden Mouth had won a spectacular victory over Eutropius and the Goths. He would have been entitled to a moment's respite. His whole life had been nothing but a series of battles and victories. A saint lives in „permanent fear and trembling”. John himself said it very beautifully: a saint lives „in permanent fear in order to be in permanent security”. Like Saint Paul, he was always preoccupied with the problem of the Last Judgment.

„I tremble, lest after having preached the Gospel to others, I myself should be condemned”. This phrase of Saint Paul, John had quoted in his first speech as a priest. And as long as he lives, he will have this phrase in his heart. He tried not to make mistakes in his capacity as a spiritual father, because now he was responsible to God not only for his own sins, but also for those of all his believers. It was a heavy responsibility.

In September of the year 400, John Chrysostom presided in Constantinople at a synod made up of 29 bishops. At the last meetings, a foreign bishop called Eusebius of Valentinopolis was presented to him. Eusebius was a man from the mountains. His bishopric/episcopate/diocese included villages perched on the tops of the mountains. His word was direct and harsh. Eusebius told John Chrysostom that he was coming to denounce the crimes committed by certain bishops in Asia and to demand the punishment of these episcopal crimes.

John asked Eusebius for details. Without a trace of hesitation, Eusebius affirmed that throughout Asia ecclesiastical dignities were being sold, making trade with them. Even episcopal crosses were sold. There were tariffs. This commercialization of the dignities, the Holy Mysteries and the episcopal crosses had been instituted by the bishop Antoninus of Ephesus.

Apart from this very profitable and widely practiced trade, Antoninus had melted down all the silver vessels of the church and sold them. He had then sold the melted silver of the holy ornaments. Moreover, this Antoninus of Ephesus had taken the marble of the episcopal baptistery and used it to build magnificent baths at his home. After which Antoninus had taken the marble columns of the church to decorate his living room. Antoninus was living with a woman officially, in full view, and had a bunch of children with her. John listened to these accusations with his head in his hands. A deacon reminded him that he had to celebrate Liturgy and called him to come to the church. But John refused, he couldn't do it after finding out such things. But he knew that Ephesus didn't belong to his bishopric/episcopate/diocese. The bishops of Constantinople had never intervened there. So what! John intervened wherever the Church had to be defended.

Cleaning the Church

John therefore started an investigation to find out if the accusations brought against the bishop of Ephesus were true. Unfortunately it was all true. A Christian from Asia confessed to John Chrysostom in a letter: „For many years, pious father, we have been led against every rule and against every right. So we beg you to come here". John was sick and winter was in full swing, but he had only one concern: the cleansing of the Church of Ephesus. The Church is the body of Christ and he (John the Golden Mouth) had to keep the Church clean.

On February 9, 401, John Chrysostom embarked for Asia. During the journey, a terrible storm broke out. So that the ship on which the saint was traveling wouldn't be broken by the waves, the sailors dropped the anchor on a deserted shore. There, deprived of water and food and battered by the waves, John and the priests who accompanied him had to wait three days for the storm to calm down. They arrived at the port exhausted from diseases and shortages.

In Ephesus, John Chrysostom convened a synod of 70 bishops. The priests and bishops guilty of having bought their episcopate with gold were also called to be present. Because the priesthood cannot be bought. But Antonin, the trafficker of grace and dignities, died before he was tried. His clients, those who had bought the dignities, came and confessed the truth, i.e. the price they paid and in how many installments. The money with which they paid for the crosses and dignities was good money.

Now, if John wanted to take back their bishops' crosses and depose them from the priesthood, he had to give them back this money. They had made a bargain. Moreover, those who had bought the priesthood confessed that they had been misled and that they had acted in good faith. „It's true that I gave this money. I thought that was the custom," they said.

John felt boundless pain for this sale of the Holy Mysteries, but those who had paid were victims. John deposed them from the rank of priesthood, but, because they were victims and had been in good faith when they paid for a thing that was not for sale, he gave them a ruling that allowed them to sue the heirs of Antoninus in the civil court and get their money back. Some of them had given their last penny to pay the requested rate and now they found themselves fired and ruined. John promised them to speak to the emperor and beg him to exempt them from taxes for a while.

In place of Antoninus, John Chrysostom left the deacon Heraclides as bishop of Ephesus. From Asia he went to the neighboring provinces: in Lycia, in Caria, in Pamphylia, in Phrygia and in Pontus. Sixteen bishops were deposed and replaced.

In Nicomedia, John Chrysostom found as a bishop a healer and an illusionist named Gerontius of Milan. Dressed in episcopal clothes, the illusionist had the greatest facilities to practice his job. John deposed the magician and took back his clothes. But the people of Nicomedia loved the magician Gerontius. The crowd protested against the replacement of Gerontius and complained to the emperor. The provinces where John Chrysostom went, where he deposed bishops and appointed others in their place, were not under his jurisdiction. And the canons forbade a bishop to interfere in the affairs of another bishopric/episcopate/diocese. „If you are surrounded by weapons even though you have no sins, God will know how to defend you. But if you are sinners, even though you will be in heaven, you will be expelled", said John.

People's love

John's journey lasted three months. On his return to Constantinople, the saint learned of the changes that had taken place in the meantime. In the first place, a plot had been formed against John, whose leaders were the dissatisfied bishops.

The old bishop Acachie, who had found the rooms of the episcopal palace so austere that he thought he was housed in the visitation room, had become John's mortal enemy. The old man was one of the leaders of the conspiracy. Then there was a bishop named Severian, jealous of the glory of John the Golden Mouth. Then came some bishops from Antioch who wanted to have the glory of their fellow citizen. The meeting place of the conspirators was at the woman Eugrafia, to whom John Goldmouth had told her that it was indecent to try to rejuvenate herself. She was an elderly woman and John had remarked to her that it wasn't common sense for her to try to look like a young girl.

Among the conjured were also the recently deposed bishops, those who had bought the Sacrament of Priesthood. And they were against John. Eugrafia's friends came next: Castricia and the empress herself. To them were added the virgins who were no longer allowed to live with the priests, as well as the priests who were no longer allowed to live with the agape virgins. Against him were also the rich, the elegant people of Constantinople, those who loved the theater, because there was no greater enemy of the theater than John. They all wanted to have a new bishop.

Instead, the people, the crowds, the poor, the oppressed, those who had no protector, the people of Constantinople asked with pathos for John's return. The people felt John's the absence. The bishop intervened daily in favor of the people, he helped them daily.

For three months, the people of Constantinople remained without a protector. And upon the news of the saint's arrival, the people gathered on the docks a day before the ship's arrival. All the poor crowd was in the harbor. As soon as the ship was seen at sea, the crowd started shouting and waving handkerchiefs. When the ship arrived in port, the joy took the proportions of a delirium. John was lifted up. Shouting, applauding, crying for joy, the crowd carried him in their arms to his residence. John was unable to speak. He was too tired. He made a sign and he asked the residents to leave him alone until the next day, to return to their homes. But the crowd stayed in the streets all night. The next day, when John addressed the people: „If we are separated in body," he told the crowd, „we remain united in love. Your gathering was always in my mind as I crossed the sea, and I trembled with hope at the thought of seeing you again".

The crowd's declarations of love towards John were as passionate as the declarations of love that the saint had addressed to the faithful. He said to the people: „I love you as you love me, what would I be without you? You are my father, you are my mother, you are my brothers, you are my children, you are everyone. I have neither joy nor pain that is not yours and when one of you perishes, I perish with him". When they heard these statements, the crowd was delirious.

In all the empire there was no man loved with a greater love by the people than John the Golden Mouth.

People's devotion

John noticed that his bishops visited the homes of aristocratic women daily, that they had lunch with the rich, that they led a worldly existence. Surely this wasn't a thing pleasing to God. A bishop is a spiritual father who must lead a life pleasing to the Lord. John publicly admonished two bishops who spent their days in invitations and receptions. Their names were Antiochus and Severian: „Antiochus and you lead a life of parasites and flatterers; you have become the laughing stock of the city and are a comedy for those who play on the stage".

Another day, John Chrysostom told the two junior bishops even more categorically that they were on the path of sin: „Gather around me these priests of dishonesty who eat at Jezebel's table, so that I may say to them like Elijah of old: How long will you limp with both feet? If Baal is God, go before him. If Jezebel's table is also God's, eat, eat, eat until you vomit".

One day, Severian quarreled with a deacon of John Chrysostom named Serapion. The deacon was one of the most faithful collaborators of John's. He was Egyptian. One day - when Severian was passing by - Serapion didn't want to greet him. There followed an exchange of harsh words between the two. Severian lost all measure and said, among other things: „If Serapion dies a Christian, then God did not become man". Witnesses were brought. Severian repeated the phrase. It's not known what the bishop wanted to say with these words, but the crowd, which was turned against the conjurers, made Severian's phrase a sacrilege and a heresy. The bishop was brought before a synod, his words were considered serious. Severian was therefore suspended from his duties and denied access to the cathedral where he had spoken these words of sacrilege.

Struck by this perhaps too harsh sentence, Severian uttered reproaches and threats to John. It was a very serious matter. Learning that Severian had threatened John, the crowd left as one to punish Severian. The news that someone dared to threaten John raised the population of the whole city, who started from all the neighborhoods to look for bishop Severian to punish him. He managed to escape the anger of the people, fleeing at night in a boat. But the crowd didn't calm down, it was looking for other culprits.

The emperor, the empress, the ladies of the palace asked John Chrysostom to forgive Severian and cancel the punishment given by the synod. At the same time, the empress summoned Severian to the capital. Back in Constantinople, despite the protection of the empress, the police and the army, the bishop couldn't appear anywhere. He remained hidden.

Seeing that Severian's situation, her favorite bishop, didn't seem to improve, the empress appeared one day in the church during the service holding her last newborn in her arms. She knelt before John and begged him in the name of her child to forgive Severian. Without the forgiveness spoken by John Chrysostom, the crowd couldn't be calmed down. As befits a saint, John Goldenmouth forgave Severian. However, it was not as easy to quell the people's revolt against Severian and the conjurers. But John knew how to speak to the crowds with passion and the crowds followed him. He asked the people to forgive his personal enemies and those who wished him harm as he had forgiven them himself and the crowd obeyed.

Chapter 8

The Christian Pharaoh

The plot of the aristocrats and the secular bishops of Constantinople had failed. However, John was attacked again. This time the attack came from somewhere else, from Egypt, from Theophilus of Alexandria. Theophilus was the one who consecrated John bishop, from the order of Eutropius. Holder of an old apostolic seat of the East, he was disturbed by the importance that the bishop of Constantinople had taken in church matters. That is why he agreed with Eudoxia to remove John.

Theophilus was nicknamed the Christian pharaoh. The bishops of Alexandria had been so called because the imperial administration had left them free in Egypt to manage civil affairs as well as Church affairs. Moreover, they had acquired great authority. Theophilus' predecessor, Saint Athanasius, one of the greatest Fathers of the Church, had been a great opponent of Arianism. Theophilus of Alexandria's career had begun to take off when he began to destroy temples and libraries. The Egyptian Christians believed that they were serving God by forming themselves into teams, which the pagans called "black gangs", and destroying the temples of the ancient gods. The greatest destroyer of temples was Theophilus of Alexandria. He personally led detachments of soldiers and attacked the temples from the front. Sometimes the pagans resisted. Theophilus himself led the plundering of the temples and the punishment of the pagans.

Demolishing temples, Theophilus contracted the disease of the pharaohs. He was cruel. This pharaoh conspired with Eudoxia to attack John Chrysostom. He was the best suited to do it. Teofil was a specialist in demolitions, destruction and extermination.

Long brothers: Ammonius, Dioscorus, Euthymius and Eusebius

The monks, called the "long brothers", were the pretext that allowed the cruel pharaoh to rush against John. In the desert of Nitra in Egypt there were four brothers, true athletes of Christ. The world knew them by their nickname: "long brothers". All four were tall, and because they ate little and hardly slept, they were all terribly thin, which made them look even bigger than they really were. Because of this, people called them "long brothers". In reality, their names were: Ammonius, Dioscorus, Euthymius and Eusebius. Dressed only in sheepskins, bare-chested and bare-legged, they lived as ascetics in the depths of the Nitra desert.

The bishop of Alexandria wanted to bring all four brothers out of the desert to make them bishops. They would've been true shepherds and leaders of souls. But the four brothers didn't want to leave the desert. One day, Theophilus, the Christian pharaoh who only acted by force, sent a detachment of soldiers with the order to arrest one of the four brothers and bring him to Alexandria to make him a bishop. Theophilus needed a good bishop. So the army rushed to bring Ammonius in chains. When he saw the soldiers coming to take him to be made a bishop, Ammonius took the knife that he used to clean vegetables and cut off his ear. The canons of the Church stipulated that to be a bishop you had to have two ears, one nose and two eyes. Amonius had only one ear left. So Theophilus could no longer make him a bishop. Ammonius continued to stay in the desert of Nitra with his brothers studying, fasting, praying and working. The four brothers earned their bread by working with their hands and weaving raffia baskets. A community had formed around the four brothers, which they led.

It was one of the monastic communities that John the Golden Mouth was referring to when he said that in the Egyptian desert there were monastic cells that shone with their virtue more powerfully than the stars of the sky and those who lived there were angels with a human face. That's how the four brothers were, four angels who lived in the desert. John regularly received news from Christ's athletes who lived in the desert. He admired and respected the four brothers.

Taken as the secretary of the bishop of Alexandria during a trip to Rome, Ammonius didn't want to leave his cell during his entire stay in the capital of the world. During his stay in Rome, Ammonius didn't want to see anything from the wonders of the greatest city in the world, nothing except the tomb of the Holy Apostle Peter. That was all. The rest of the city didn't interest him. He returned to the desert without having seen Rome, although he stayed in it.

However, Teofil didn't want to leave the four brothers alone in the desert. One day, the bishop Teofil wanted to seize the inheritance of a rich widow. In order to falsify the succession documents, he needed the complicity of his administrator, but the bishop's steward was a man who didn't want to make forgeries. His name was Isidor and he was a faithful monk. He stubbornly refused to become an accomplice in the bishop's theft. Teofil had the administrator arrested. Isidor was tortured and handed over to civil justice. In order to condemn him, however, witnesses had to be found against Isidor. Isidor was a fair administrator, but anyone can be convicted with false witnesses. It is no longer necesary for the accused to be guilty. It is enough to have witnesses. Theophilus sent for the four monks of the desert.

Isidor's honor was known to everyone and in order to condemn such an honest man, Theophilus needed the testimony of people even more honest than Isidore. In all of Egypt, only the four brothers had a greater reputation as honest people than Isidor. Teofil summoned them and ordered them to sign false statements against the administrator. The four brothers refused. Teofil, who had at his disposal detachments of police and armed forces to lead the bishopric/episcopate/diocese, ordered that the four brothers be put in chains, all four of them. They were put in chains. But even after being put in chains, they refused to make false statements. Teofil started hitting them. He himself. The bishop beat them with his episcopal hands until they were filled with blood. After beating them with his episcopal hands, blackening their eyes, swelling their noses, covering them with bruises all over, the bishop ordered them to be laid on the ground and tied. And the bishop trampled all four of them with his episcopal feet until he broke their bones. But they still didn't want to give false statements.

They were taken to the city jail in chains. When the faithful crowd saw the holiest men of Egypt chained like criminals, they trembled with indignation. All of Alexandria shook. But Theophilus spread the rumor that the four brothers were guilty of heresy, namely Origenism. The rumor only half caught on, although Teofil had fed it with all kinds of arguments.

The four brothers were then set free and returned to the desert.

One day, Teofil called a detachment of policemen, put himself at the head of it and left on horseback in the Nitria desert. Arriving in Nitria, the soldiers commanded by the bishop rushed against the monastic cells about which John wrote that „the stars of the sky are less bright than them”. The cells were set on fire by the soldiers. The monks who came out of the burned cells were chased away and killed by the soldiers. About this night of massacre ordered by Theophilus, Palladius writes: „The bloody boar ravaged Christ's vineyard”. The massacre of the monks lasted until daylight. The four brothers and three hundred monks managed to flee into the desert. Others died. Only three hundred escaped the massacre.

At dawn, from the cells that had shone in the desert like stars, only ashes remained. The 300 monks who escaped the massacre, led by the four „long brothers”, were almost naked. Without anything. This is how they had saved themselves from their burned cells during the night. The monks said prayers. Then they decided to separate into small groups and continue the way scattered through the desert. The three hundred monks met at the Palestinian border. Then, full of faith in God, confident in the Lord, they left one after the other through the burning sand.

Back in Alexandria, Theophilus anathematized and excommunicated those who had escaped the massacre and were wandering in small groups through the desert.

Persecution

At the meeting at the Palestinian border, out of the 300 monks, only 80 came. The rest, 220, died during the journey through the desert. They died of hunger, sunstroke, disease. The surviving monks took their dead brothers and then crossed the border into Palestine. They headed in a group towards Jerusalem. The bishop of Jerusalem received them as brothers, because the whole Christian world knew the virtue of the ascetics from Nitria. They settled near Jerusalem and began to work, pray and lead their ascetic life.

Meanwhile, the bishop of Jerusalem received the following letter from Theophilus of Alexandria: „You should not, against my will, have received into your city the monks of Nitria, for I banished them for their crimes. However, if you did it out of ignorance, I forgive you. Take care from now on not to have communion with those whom I have excommunicated, and beware of granting them ecclesiastical functions or residence in your jurisdiction". (Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom)

The bishop of Jerusalem was afraid of the Christian pharaoh of Egypt. He invited the "long brothers" and the 80 refugees to leave Jerusalem urgently. Driven out of Jerusalem, the monks of Nitra set off. They have sought asylum elsewhere. But the order of Theophilus had arrived everywhere, forbidding them to stay. They were driven from everywhere. They weren't allowed to stay anywhere. The "long brothers" and the procession of monks headed for the sea. On earth, they were not allowed to stop. Arriving in Caesarea, they boarded an old ship and headed for Constantinople. The "long brothers" knew that John was a bishop in Constantinople and a saint couldn't refuse to grant asylum to refugees.

The courage with which John fought for the faith and for the truth was known by the entire Christian world. The "long brothers" knew that he was willing to give his life rather than sacrifice the truth. Because of this, the ship with the eighty saints was traveling with hope towards John the Golden Mouth.

The asylum

Another 30 monks died during the journey. Of the 300 who escaped from the night of the Nitra massacre, only 50 remained who disembarked in Constantinople to ask John the Golden Mouth for permission to remain on the land of his bishopric/episcopate/ diocese. It was all the monks asked for: permission to stay on earth to pray and do God's will. John immediately received the 50 brothers whom Theophilus had accused of Origenism, and discussed with the „long brothers" to see if they were in heresy. His duty, as shepherd of souls, was to defend the Church against heresy. But he did not see any heresy in the spirituality of the ascetics of Nitra. Moreover, John was very impressed by the sufferings and horrors endured by the 50 saints now before him. John said to the „long brothers": „I take this problem upon myself and I will do it in such a way that either another synod absolves you, or that your bishop voluntarily lifts your excommunication. Count on me".

Until the meeting of a new synod, John also considered the 50 monks as excommunicated. They had no right to receive communion. It is true that Bishop Teofil was a tyrant and had committed an unjust act. But he was a bishop and the excommunication was valid. The injustice had no doubt to be redressed, but until it was redressed the monks had to endure it. A true Christian must know how to bear even injustices. John hosted the monks of Nitra in the houses of the Church of the Resurrection.

The task of feeding and taking care of them was entrusted to Olympia. This first collaborator of John was an aristocrat with a fabulous fortune. Left a widow shortly after her marriage, Olympia had donated all her possessions to the poor and consecrated herself to the Church. At that time Olympia hadn't turned 30 years old yet, but her virtue was considered, by all contemporaries, unique in the entire empire. John assigned her to take care of the wretched monks of Nitria, because he knew that no one would take care of them better than her.

John Chrysostom asked the monks to avoid going out into the streets of Constantinople. In addition, he made another request to them and begged them to comply with it: they shouldn't, at any cost, ask for the protection of the emperor or empress who represented the worldly authority. „It is for the Church, he said, to judge the things of the Church. Worldly tribunals have nothing to do with the debates that concern the service of God". (Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom)

According to the canons

During the same day, John began to deal with the fate of the wandering monks. He wrote a letter to Theophilus of Alexandria with the following content:

„I questioned the monks of Nitria and, truly, I didn't discover in their teaching anything contrary to the true faith, but grief twisted their heads. They want to denounce you to the emperor and presented me with a request with this intention, the sending of which they renounced at my request". After which John pleaded with Teofil: „So you yourself cancel their excommunication, forgive them and everything will end".

John didn't forget that in addition to being the head of the Church and the guardian of church discipline, he is also a servant of the truth.

At the moment, he respected the discipline of the Church and the excommunication pronounced by Theophilus, but since this excommunication was unjust, he will fight for the truth and will himself convene a synod that will judge the brothers of Nitra. This was, once again, not according to the canons, but it was according to the truth.

More merciful than the saint

While John was bravely telling Theophilus that the excommunication of the brothers from Nitria was unjust and that if Theophilus didn't cancel this excommunication he would convene a synod to establish the truth, empress Eudoxia suddenly covered the monks with imperial benefactions. The saint committed himself with courage, defending the fugitives against Teofil, but he respected the canons and didn't receive them for communion. During this time, Eudoxia accused him of imprisoning the refugees in a penitentiary monastery. She started circulating rumors to make an impression. „The monks of Nitria were deprived of the Holy Mysteries, they were hungry". All these rumors circulated at one time in Constantinople. Eudoxia wanted to show that she was more merciful than the saint. However, the unfortunate and morally broken monks, had not asked for the protection of the empress. Eudoxia imposed it on them by force. She forced them to sign a petition begging for this protection. Seeing that some of them die in the church of the resurrection without receiving the Holy Mysteries, the monks of Nitria accepted the protection of the empress who promised to restore them to their rights as Christians. The empress informed the monks that in the shortest possible time a synod would be convened in Constantinople to lift the excommunication and grant them forgiveness. Seeing that the empress was meddling in this matter, John Goldenmouth withdrew. Church problems could not be solved by the emperors. Eudoxia had no right to convene synods and determine whether an excommunication was just or not. This matter was the competence of the Fathers and Teachers of the Church.

All this time, the empress, the worldly bishops and all the enemies of John Chrysostom didn't stop showing their special attention to the monks in Egypt to show them that John Chrysostom was not protecting them enough.

They want me dead

John was satisfied with what was happening, with the fact that the emperor and empress called the synod promised to the Egyptian monks. He even promised to personally assist. He was determined, as he had been from the beginning, to defend them. The empress kept her word and convened the synod in record time.

Under the John's presidency, the synod was supposed to judge Teofil in principle. In reality, all John's enemies had teamed up for the synod to judge the one who was supposed to preside over it, John the Golden Mouth himself. Theophilus strove for this purpose since his arrival in Constantinople. The program of the synod meetings included not only the issue of the Egyptian monks refugees in Constantinople, but also the complaints submitted by the bishops in Asia deposed by John the Golden Mouth!

„They want my death", said John. Every time he encountered evil, John was surprised, Paladie tells us, because he was a pure man. The fact that the empress, the Christian pharaoh and the army of Egyptian bishops wanted to kill him didn't scare him. John was never afraid of death. No saint is afraid of death.

He continued to regard the synod as destined to judge Theophilus, and he even, in the end, refused to go to the synod out of canonical scruples; he had no right as bishop of Constantinople to deal with the affairs of Alexandria.

Chapter 9

Specialists of the century

The Council of Constantinople therefore had as its object the condemnation of John the Golden Mouth. In order to save appearances in front of public opinion, the monks from Egypt were enrolled in the work schedule. In the end, John was to be suppressed. The judiciary had to remove the trial of the martyred monks from Nitria from the list without scandalizing public opinion. They left only the trial of John's, a trial that wasn't even discussed at the time of its summoning.

This is how the empress and the Egyptian ecclesiastical judges proceeded to eliminate the trial of the martyred monks. In the spring of 403, an old and highly revered bishop from Cyprus, named Epiphanius, appeared in Constantinople. His specialty was detecting heresies. All his life he had done nothing but look for heresies in all the monks in the depths of the desert, on the mountains, in the monasteries or in the cities. Epifanie was the specialist of the century in the matter. Such a technician was necessary, because the Church did not have such learned people. A technician who could be called upon every time a heresy arose was indispensable to the Church. Epiphanius knew the Bible, the dogmas, the doctrines, all the deviations from the right faith, which wasn't the case for most of the bishops who made up a synod. In this capacity, Epiphanius took part in all the synods. The bishops of the synods unanimously voted what Epiphanius recommended to them. Sent to Constantinople, Epiphanius arrived first.

Epiphanius acted as if John Chrysostom was already condemned for Origenism because he had supported the Origenist monks. He began to celebrate in Constantinople, although this was forbidden by the canons. A bishop doesn't have the right to celebrate in another bishopric/episcopate/diocese without the permission of the local bishop. Epiphanius baptized and ordained priests in John's diocese without asking for his consent. But John kept his composure, because apart from other virtues, a saint must also have patience.

After challenging John Chrysostom, whom he had never even seen, Epiphanius found the opportunity to liquidate the trial of the Egyptian monks. The problem was solved with a fantasy worthy of a detective novel. The empress pretexted that one of her children was seriously ill. No imperial child was sick, but this staging was part of the technique necessary to eliminate the process of the monks of Nitria. After announcing throughout the city that one of her children was seriously ill, in order to make the people sad, Eudoxia sent for the holy bishop Epiphanius to save her child from death. Elder Epiphanie refused to go to the palace to save the empress's son from death, as it had been previously agreed upon: „The empress's child will remain alive if the monks from Egypt renounce heresy and return to the right faith".

The empress and the ladies of the palace ran to the monastery where the monks from Egypt were imprisoned and begged them to confess their faith: if they do not obey Theophilus and Epiphanius, the empress's child will die, and they will be guilty for the death of a prince.

The monks from Egypt knew that they were not in heresy. They had nothing to abjure. They were the victims of the Christian pharaoh who had exterminated their brothers and driven them from their cells. But the empress insisted: her child was about to die if they didn't obey Teofil. Ammonius, the first of the "long brothers", was carried almost up to the house of the old technician and expert in matters of faith.

When he was before him, Ammonius had the courage to ask Epiphany: „Do you know me?”. The old bishop answered negative. He didn't know it was Ammonius. He had never seen him. The eldest of the "long brothers" presented himself. He said it was Ammonium. He then asked Epifanie if he had read any of his books or any of his brothers' books. The "long brothers" had published several works of Christian teaching. Epifanie had not read any of the works of the "long brothers"!

„But if you don't know me and if you haven't read any of our books, how do you know that we are in heresy and why do you want to exterminate us?” asked Ammonius. The old investigator understood that, this time, he had been drawn into a trap. He would automatically arrive where a heresy waspointed out to him. Those who had pulled him along were Eudoxia and Theophilus, the Christian pharaoh. The old bishop realized that the brothers from Nitria were not heretics. It was just a well-woven plot. He refused to continue playing the intrigue game. It was a shameful thing for a man of his age. There were also the reproaches that Epiphanie had heard from John's deacon, Serapion: holding his staff (rod), Serapion had planted himself in front of Epiphanius and had listed to him, when he wanted to enter the church, all the illegalities that he, the old technical bishop of heresies, had committed in Constantinople.

Epiphanius understood truths from Serapion and Ammonius that he found just. That's why he thought he had to get out of this business as quickly as possible. He took a ship and left Constantinople in the greatest haste. He left before the synod members arrived. The old heresy detector died on the ship that was taking him home to Cyprus.

The death of Epiphanius, however, could not prevent the condemn ation of Saint John Chrysostom.

The opposite of pleasure

A synod judges like a court. The Synod proceeded to the interrogations, collected the pieces of accusation and pronounced all the ecclesiastical punishments. Moreover, it collected evidence that, after the intervention of the state, led to corporal punishment and exile. The mission of the Church consists in showing what the true faith is. But as the empire had agreed to protect the Church, it also got rid of those whom it designated as heretics. Thus, any decision of a synod practically led to the execution of these decisions by state agents. By resorting to this procedure in the case of John Chrysostom, it pleased the empress Eudoxia, the virgins who were no longer allowed to sleep under the same roof with the priests and all those who disliked being the contemporaries and neighbors of a saint. And these were numerous. It is no pleasure to be the neighbor of a saint. A saint is austere. He is the opposite of pleasure.

The meeting from Stejar

At the head of the Egyptian prelates was the Christian pharaoh, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria. Emperor Arcadius made available to the pharaoh the imperial villa in the Stejar park. In this villa, Theophilus lived like a crowned head. He had a bodyguard and, in addition to the guard, he had the army of Egypt. Immediately, all those who wanted John's death gathered at his villa in a suburb of Constantinople, close to Chalcedon. John refused to intervene in the meeting at Stejar: the synod had to judge Theophilus and he didn't want to interfere. He thus gave the pharaoh a free hand.

Tigrius

John spent almost all his time in the episcopal palace, in the room that had once served as Nectarie's dining room. Now it was an austere, vast room, furnished with wooden chairs in the style of monastery dining rooms. Here, John used to meet his friends. Among them was Olympiad „whose manly and firm courage faced the fears and pettiness of the world". It was Prendiatia, the wife of the general Tomasius, killed by Eutropius. It was Salvina, a Moorish friend who had dedicated her life to the Church. It was Serapion, the faithful deacon; Cassian, another faithful deacon, famous connoisseur of the spirituality of the Egyptian monks, who would later build the Saint-Victor church in Marseilles. The literate deacons Produs, Heraclides, Philip, the priest Germanus and other holy priests, deacons and bishops were then on John's side. If everyone had gone to Stejar, they would've had the majority!

Among them was the priest Tigrius who loved the bishop with boundless love. Tigrius was a slave born on the banks of the Tigris. That's why he had no other name. Slaves were not allowed to have a name. They were given that of the country they came from. All his life, this Tigrius wanted only one thing: to become a free man. His dream was to no longer be a slave. Near the end of his life, Tigrius was able to redeem himself from his last master and become a free man, a liberated one. From the day he became free, Tigrius didn't attempt to trade, nor to accede to the offices to which his condition as a free man entitled him. He wanted freedom to do something better: he offered his freedom to God with all his heart. He became a monk. He wanted to get rid of the chains to become a monk.

That's when John met him. The saint was amazed by the righteous and unwavering faith of the former slave who had gained freedom after severe hardships to then bring it as a gift to Jesus. John invited Tigrius to come with him and be his deacon. After which he ordained him a priest. A slave, even freed, is not allowed to receive the Sacrament of Priesthood. But John Chrysostom knew that all who had faith could receive it, and not one of all whom John Chrysostom had met had the faith of Tigrius.

Now, all John's friends were around him, worried. Around the episcopal residence, at every window, at every gate, at every corner of the house, on the whole street, the people of Constantinople crowded. After the news spread that the condemnation of the saint protector of the poor was imminent, the crowd didn't leave his house for even a moment day and night. When he entered the church, John found it full. Day and night, throughout the process, the church was full. The crowd waited for their patron saint at all hours of the day and night; in large numbers, as for the holiday. Every time they saw him, the crowd begged the saint to open his lips and say a few words. Even just a phrase. John Chrysostom's words were the bread of the poor.

One day, towards the middle of July, the trial began. John and his friends were as usual in the large room that had been the old episcopal dining room. Palladie recounts that at one point, in the middle of the discussion, John had a presentiment of the danger that awaited him and, interrupting the one who was speaking, said: „Pray, my brothers, and, if you love Christ, let none of you leave his Church because of me, because I can tell you with the Apostle: the time of my stabbing is near, I have fought the good fight, my running is over. I know Satan and his traps. Satan can no longer endure the wars I have waged against him. May God have mercy on me! My brothers, remember me in your prayers".

A solemn silence followed. Then the cries of some of those present were heard. After which everyone started to cry. Some, choked with tears, wanted to get up, to go and cry somewhere else because the hoarseness was rising in their throats. The saint's words were clear and unambiguous. Saint John Chrysostom had felt that he was going to die. And he said goodbye to his friends. Besides, the rumor circulated in the city that the assassination of the saint had already been decided and approved by the emperor. „John Chrysostom will be beheaded with an ax for the crime of rebellion and outrage against Empress Eudoxia". It was said that the meeting of the open synod that day was only a formality. The sentence had already been pronounced. All the friends of the saint had learned this news. But now hearing the words of parting and farewell from the saint's own mouth, they burst into cries. Paladie says that the muffled cries of those who surrounded John resembled „the buzzing of restless bees around their hive".

John Golden Mouth said to those who were heading towards the gate: „Don't go. Stay, my brothers. Sit down and stop crying. I told you and I always repeat: Christ is my life and death is my gain”.

One of the bishops said: „If we cry, it's because we see ourselves orphaned, because we see the widowed Church, the holy laws disturbed; ambition, infidelity triumphing, the poor abandoned, the people left without education”.

John had his own gesture when he wanted to end a discussion. With the index finger of his right hand he would strike the palm of his left hand, a gesture that meant „enough with the chatter”. Then he said to those present: „Do not subscribe, but cooperate with my successor. Cooperate so that there is no schism”. This was John Chrysostom's last concern: that after his death, his friends would not separate from the true Church, from the Church of the apostles. For this, they had to collaborate with whatever bishop came after him.

At this time, the servant Eutropius entered the hall and announced that two foreign priests had just arrived and wanted to speak to John personally. The newcomers were sent to the synod.

The notice

The saint's friends looked at the arrivals. Nobody knew them. There were two foreign figures and wore priestly clothes. John Golden Mouth asked them what rank they had in the Church to which the foreigners answered: „We are bishops”. And they presented themselves. They were both very young, one of them was called Dioscorus, the other Pavel, both from Lydia.

"We are only the bearers of a letter for you. Allow it to be read”, said one of the two bishops. John made a gesture of approval. The bishop began to read: „The holy synod gathered at Stejar, to John...”

John's friends understood what would follow. Even the addressing was a challenge. It was written: „to John” without any title, without the title of bishop. „The Holy Synod gathered at Stejar, to John: we have received a complaint against you denouncing an infinity of crimes of which you are guilty. We command you to appear here, before us, bringing with you the priests Serapion and Tigrius, because we need them”.

The Synod of Hell

John's bishops friends wrote a letter of response to the synod and they all signed it. John wrote a personal letter to Theophilus who was presiding over this synod. In the two letters, the synod was advised that John didn't accept to appear before it, because the synod was illegally constituted by direct and declared enemies of the saint and thus was contrary to the canons and was taking place in a territory foreign to the diocese. These two letters were sent through three bishops (Lipinius, Demetrius and Eulysius) and two priests (Germanus and Severus).

When they arrived at Stejar, the synod was in full session. The three bishops carrying letters presented themselves before the holy fathers and before Teofil. Their arrival angered the bishops. The members of the synod left their seats and rushed forward with their fists at the three messengers. John's envoys were knocked to the ground by the members of the synod in a full meeting hall. Their clothes were torn to pieces. They were stripped and covered in blood. One of the bishops, a member of the synod, brought a rope to the meeting to be passed around John's neck, like those used to catch wild horses. This member of the synod wanted to throw from his seat the rope around John's neck, when he appeared before them. Furious that he didn't see John Chrysostom appear so that he could put the „rope around his neck", this member used it to tie up one of the bearers of the letter. After being tied up naked and covered in blood, John's envoy was dragged out of the meeting hall by all the members of the synod. Then the holy members of the synod put the bearer of the letter in a boat which they let drift on the sea. The other two were also dragged into the street, stripped of their clothes and beaten. It was the first activity of the Synod of Stejar led by Theophilus of Alexandria.

The vagabonds' accusations

While John's envoys were stripped and beaten by the Synod of Stejar, the saint was visited by an imperial notary who also presented him with a summons to appear before the council of judges. The emperor therefore recognized the validity of the synod convened to judge Theophilus, but which was now judging John the Golden Mouth. After the imperial notary, a third summons arrived, brought by two monks. During the same day, John was summoned by three summonses. But he categorically refused to appear before an illegal synod. After they mistreated the envoys of the saint, seeing that he didn't appear, the members of the synod began to judge him in absence. This fact was illegal either, but the emperor had given a special authorization for the procedure in absentia. Patriarch Fotie later carefully collected the documents related to the accusations brought against John at th is synod, as well as the minutes of the debates.

John was accused of 29 ecclesiastical and political crimes. For these 29 crimes, the Synod of Stejar judged him in absentia. His life has been investigated since his childhood, just as the life of criminals is investigated. Despite their stubbornness, Theophilus and his friends didn't find any shadow in the saint's past. Antuza's son had an impeccable life. However, 29 „crimes” committed later were discovered. The synod members worked for a long time to discover them. On the first day, when they mistreated John's envoys, there were only 36 members. At the end, there were 46. Others were constantly being brought. Wherever an enemy of John the Golden Mouth was discovered, he was called to become a member of the synod. Among the 29 crimes for which John was tried and convicted, there was also the crime of priesting Father Tigrius, the former redeemed slave, who had won his freedom to give it to God by becoming a monk.

John was accused of bathing alone. He did this until the end of his days. They accused him of narcissism.

Then John was accused of eating honey candies. The holy judges from Stejar also condemned him for sweets, because he ate them especially after communion so that not a single particle of the Holy Sacrament would remain in his mouth. On the other hand, the candies were made of honey, and he, who often talked for hours without interruption, felt the need to put a honey candy in his mouth from time to time, so that his throat wouldn't dry out.

John was then accused of sleeping with women. It was the most infamous accusation. He, whose body was dry from fasting, lack of sleep and asceticism, couldn't be accused of anything like that. But the Synod from Stejar condemned him for this as well. This accusation hurt John the most. In a much later letter to Chiriac, he says: „They (the judges from Stejar) also say that I slept with a woman. Undress my body and you will see the pitiful state of my limbs". (Letter 125 to Bishop Chiriac)

The Synod of Stejar also tried and condemned John because he ate alone and because and on days, when he had severe stomach pains or when it was very hot, he put two drops of medicinal wine in the water he drank.

Among the 29 iniquities committed by John, there is the crime of not folding his priestly clothes with enough care. Eyewitnesses were brought in who declared that they saw John not arranging his clothes properly.

The Synod also collected testimonies to prove that John was guilty of treason. Here is the letter that the Synod of Stejar presented to the emperor: „Considering that John, accused of certain crimes, feeling guilty, refused to come and justify himself before us and that, in this case, the canonical laws provide for deposition, we removed him from his post. However, since the accusations contain, in addition to ecclesiastical crimes, offence to the emperor, it is up to your mercy to order the punishment of the guilty, so that such a great crime may not remain unpunished. As for us, it's not ours to know”.

After condemning John, the judges from Stejar asked for the monks from Egypt to be brought. Their trial lasted a very short time. Most of the brothers from Nitria were dead. Their leader Ammonius had also died. Some of them were brought on a stretcher. They were forced to come before Theophilus and the forty-five bishops and say the following phrase: „If we have wronged you, we repent and ask for your forgiveness”. Once this formality was over, the synod awaited Jonh's execution. The activity of the Synod at Stejar had ended.

Chapter 10

The emperor's refusal

The reaction of Emperor Arcadius was a surprise for his entourage, when he received the sentence condemning John the Golden Mouth. The emperor clearly saw the sentence of the Synod at Stejar and trembled. The emperor categorically refused to sentence the saint to death. Eudoxia was stunned when she saw her husband take a stand. And how great was her surprise when the emperor declared with the same will that he would not send John into exile. It's true, the synod had condemned him to exile, but the synod couldn't send him without the emperor's order.

Despite Eudoxia's insistence, the emperor refused to exile the saint. Moreover, Arcadius gave the categorical order that no violence should be done against the holy bishop.

We want a fair synod

If the decision of the Stejar synod was taken into account, John would no longer have been a bishop and he should have gone into exile. Immediately after pronouncing the sentence and without waiting for the emperor's order, Eudoxia sent a palace officer to inform John Goldenmouth that he had to prepare for departure and that he had to go into exile voluntarily.

John received the imperial messenger and answered categorically that he would not leave. The officer, who had no other mission than to inform him, withdrew. He informed the empress that John refused to leave. The empress, who didn't want to force John without her husband's approval, tried another way. Almost every hour she sent an officer to the episcopal palace to invite John to leave. She hoped that at the end, tired of so many invitations, John would pack his bags and leave. But, each time, the bishop was even more categorical in his answer.

All this time, John took care of his ecclesiastical problems as if the Synod of Stejar had not even existed and as if nothing had happened. But the crowd of Constantinople was gathered around his house, the Saint Sophia Church was full. Every citizen of Constantinople felt obliged to defend with his own body the life of John the Golden Mouth, the crowd stood guard day and night, not only around John's house but over the whole city.

John told them: „Freed from the bonds that make the rich man a slave rather than a master of the earth, the poor man is the lion that breathes fire from his nostrils. Raised above the things of the world, there's nothing that the poor man doesn't undertake and execute for the good of the Church”. Poverty is the first condition of virtue and faith.

John loved the poor, and the poor loved their protector. This time, the poor had taken the defense of John into their own hands. And there were many of them. The poor were determined not to back down, not to risk anything, not even their own lives, to defend John.

John invited his believers to remain calm. For the moment the crowd was calm. But no one stayed at home. From time to time, the people went out in processions, singing religious songs along the streets. Sometimes the people began to shout: „We want a synod that will do justice to our bishop”. Then, the crowd continued to chant hymns of praise to God, marching through the city day and night.

Three days had passed since the pronouncement of the sentencing and punishment of John, but nothing happened during this entire period of time. Everything was as before. On the third day, John climbed the pulpit and addressed the crowd of believers who begged him to speak and not to leave them in this oppressive waiting. And John the Golden Mouth said to them:

„The threats of the world, I trample underfoot; its promises, I mock. I fear no poverty... death makes me not tremble, I desire to live only for your good spiritual evolution". And he also said to the crowd: „No one will be able to separate us. I suffer all this out of love for you. And what would I not suffer for you? Here is my homeland and my family, you are my brothers and my children, together we form one body. You are my light, a light sweeter than that of the sun. Your love weaves a crown for me for the ages to come. I say these things in your ear: who could imagine a more benevolent attention than yours? You have watched for so many days, and nothing could move you, neither length of time, nor fear, nor threats".

John's words of love stired the crowd; it made it clap, cry, shout. The crowd swore eternal faith to John until death and beyond death. John told them in this speech that nothing will be able to separate them. And they promised, in turn, that they would never part with him.

This John's speech is known under the title *Homily before departure in exile*. Speaking of the shameful events that took place on the occasion of the Stejar synod, John uses a play on words: in Greek, *eudoxia* means honor and *adoxia* means the opposite of honor, dishonor.

The Synod of Stejar, says John, was an adoxia (dishonor). The sentence given by the synod was an adoxia. The conduct of Theophilus and the Egyptian bishops was also an adoxia. The bad treatment brought to the priests by Teofil's judges was an adoxia. Infamy, adoxia (dishonor), was the empress. The real name of the empress was not Eudoxia, but Adoxia (dishonor).

The day after this insolent speech was delivered, the imperial officers who appeared before John Chrysostom didn't tell him as before to pack his bags and leave. This time they showed him the written order obliging them to use force, if he refused to go into exile.

John thought for a moment. If he resists, the steps of his house, the steps of the church will be red with blood. The crowd was only waiting for a sign to oppose the soldiers. John replied to the soldiers that he agreed to leave, but on one condition: to be given the opportunity to leave the house without being seen by the crowd. For if the crowd had seen that John was being arrested, blood would have been shed and he didn't want to shed blood. John wanted to go into exile, but without the people shedding their blood for him, because he „died with every human who died”.

The officers waited for John to leave his residence secretly, without being seen by anyone.

The eviction

John's departure took place at night. Because all the windows and all the neighboring streets were guarded by the crowd waiting to defend the holy bishop, he went out through a tunnel that led to a district outside the city. Crossing this tunnel, John was accompanied by two plainclothes policemen. The uniforms would've attracted the crowd's attention and the alarm would've been raised. Despite these precautions and despite the night, as soon as he came out of the tunnel in the neighborhood on the outskirts of Constantinople accompanied by the two policemen, John was recognized by the first passers-by and the alarm was sounded, the people were warned. The crowd wanted to lynch the policemen. However, John defended the policemen and barely freed himself from the group of citizens who tried to stop him and defend him with their bodies. He arrived at the port. There were soldiers in uniform, officers the empress's envoys in uniform. John was boarded on the ship that was waiting for him and that hurriedly set off for the place of exile.

Charged atmosphere

The news of John's eviction and his departure into exile spread like lightning. It was late and dark but the entire population of Constantinople took to the streets. The crowd split into three groups. No one was in command, but the first group, consisting mainly of men, detached the boats from the shore. All the existing boats went out to sea. In these boats there were men with burning torches who were trying to reach the ship that was carrying the bishop. The sea was covered with lights. All night these boats crossed the water and searched for the holy prisoner.

The second group of citizens occupied all the churches. The crowd knew that the defender of the churches had been taken. And they became the defender of the churches, whether it was the Saint Sophia church or others.

The rest of the population didn't leave the streets. Carrying lighted candles, in procession, the crowd wandered all night through the streets of Constantinople „overwhelmed with grief", singing litanies. No act of violence was reported. But the atmosphere was charged. One could suspect that the fire would break out somewhere, because the pain of the crowd, after the bishop was taken, was very great. Constantinople was suffering to the last man as if a great catastrophe had been announced.

The earthquake

The day after John's departure into exile, Theophilus and the Egyptian bishops, who condemned him, appeared at the palace and „begged the help of the arm of the state" to install the new bishop and the new priests. Eudoxia ordered the army and police to be made available to the Christian pharaoh Theophilus to occupy the churches and install the new prelates.

This time the crowd lost its patience. When the Egyptians appeared at the head of the troops to take possession of the churches, the crowd resisted. The churches were full of people, the faithful of John Goldenmouth. They barricaded themselves and decided to die rather than let the usurpers enter the holy places.

Teofil had a long experience in church assaults. He also had Eudoxia's authorization. He had the police and the army. He proceeded with the churches and the population of Constantinople as he proceeded with the monks of Nitria. The soldiers were ordered to act without any planning. The chronicler Zosim tells that it was enough for a citizen to be dressed in black to be killed by the empress's soldiers. It's an exaggeration, but bloody encounters certainly took place.

In the course of the same night, while the corpses still lay in the churches and in the streets, and the soldiers still continued to hunt the Christians faithful to the bishop, through the districts of the city, the ground began to shake. Constantinople is shaken by frequent earthquakes. People were used to this. But that night the earthquake was so strong that the empress's bed overturned and Eudoxia was thrown to the ground. The empress stood up in fear and thought that her last hour had come. She ran to her husband, fell on her knees and begged him to call back John:

„The man I expelled is a righteous man and God is avenging him. If you want to keep your empire, call him back without delay”.

Arcadius replied that it wasn't he who banished John. The empress and the egyptians exiled him, emperor Arcadius had a peaceful conscience. The emperor told Eudoxia that if she wanted to call John back, he wouldn't object.

Eudoxia's humiliation

Eudoxia wrote - with her own hand - that night, the following letter addressed to John the Golden Mouth: „I beseech your holiness not to think that I have taken part in the things that have happened to you. I am innocent of your blood. Wicked and corrupt men have hatched a plot against you. God is my witness of the truth of my words as well as of the tears that I offer to Him”.

The letter was entrusted to an aide-de-camp who was ordered to hand it right into John's hands. The bishop had landed in the town of Hieron, not far from Constantinople. Hieron was the first stage on the road to exile. There he should've found the empress's letter and her plea to come back, to forgive them and resume his position as bishop and pastor.

Eudoxia's despair

But John was not at Hieron, however. The officer carrying the empress's letter looked for him everywhere and couldn't find him. The bishop had disappeared. The police, the army, and local officials were called in to search the entire region until dawn, meter by meter without finding a trace of him. Concerned that the officer who was supposed to bring the bishop back was showing no signs of life, the empress hastily sent a second aide to Hieron. He began to look for John Chrysostom together with the first imperial envoy.

During this time, Constantinople was restless. People feared that the bishop had been assassinated. The people got into boats and went in searching for him. The third imperial delegate was also sent. Eudoxia was overcome with despair. The people were boiling and were openly hostile to the empress, who was accused of having killed the bishop and now pretended to be looking for him in order to deceive the people. But the empress was looking for him sincerely and with the same anxiety as all the citizens of Constantinople.

The imperial police, sent to the spot, finally managed to discover where John the Golden Mouth was. They went there and conveyed to the empress the pleas to return to Constantinople and forgive everyone. But the bishop didn't trust them. He had been landed at Hieron during the night. Seeing himself on this almost deserted shore, he suspected that the police wanted to assassinate him and, taking advantage of the darkness, he disappeared from their sight. He made his way on foot to a friend's villa in Proenetos, where he was hiding at the time.

He didn't believe in the sincerity of the invitation formulated by the empress. He thought the police wanted to lure him into a trap. Only when the empress sent her first eunuch Brisson, who was a friend of John Chrysostom, the bishop believed the promises made and agreed to return.

John's return

The bishop's return produced a veritable delirium in Constantinople. In all the streets, people sang songs of joy and gave thanks to God. A part of the inhabitants went before the saint to escort him with their boats. Another party began to look for Theophilus and the egyptians who had been part of the council in order to throw them into the sea.

Seeing that all the harm he had tried to do to get rid of Saint John the Golden Mouth had been in vain, Theophilus now had only one concern: to save his life. With great difficulty he managed to find an old ship and embark in an isolated port with all his egyptians so as not to be cut to pieces by the crowd.

While the Christian pharaoh was moving away from Constantinople, happy that he had saved his life and vowing never to set foot in the city again, the crowd had gathered in the port of the Nariana district, where the saint was supposed to disembark. John was lifted up by the crowd and taken to the cathedral. The crowd enthroned him and asked him to speak.

The crowd wept for joy and begged him not to keep silent, to tell them something, to speak to them. And all the people wept for joy. John Goldenmouth was also emotional. He told them what had happened to him, then addressed the people:

„O the generosity of my flock! In the absence of her shepherd, she put the wolves to flight. O beauty, or rather, the purity of the bride. In the absence of the bridegroom she kept the corrupters at bay. And so shone her true beauty, so shone her wisdom. How didst thou cast out the adulterers? By the greatness of thy purity. Where are they now? In darkness. Where are we? In joy. The emperors are with us. The people of power are with us”.

Eudoxia and Arcadius were with the people, again faithful to John the Golden Mouth. But this reconciliation wasn't to last long.

Chapter 11

The goddess Eudoxia

Resuming his episcopal functions, John asked the emperor to convene a new synod, a true one, to rule on the accusations brought against him by the synod of Stejar. The emperor and Eudoxia promised him. The insults uttered against bishop John had to be erased. The date of this synod was not fixed immediately, because the Eastern Roman Empire had another urgent concern that demanded its full attention.

The empire had retained certain customs from the time when it was still pagan. Thus the imperial statues had a sacred character because they represented the „Anointed One of God”. It was a Christianized vestige of the old imperial cult. Because it broke some statues, Antioch would have been razed to the ground if John, helped by the ascetics, hadn't saved it.

The emperor's wife, children, parents were also revered, but not through statues. Eudoxia felt offended. She demanded that her statues be venerated. She claimed a cult equal to that of her husband. The Eastern Roman Empire considered Eudoxia's request a calamity. Nothing like it had ever been seen in all the glorious history of the empire. Eudoxia stubbornly insisted. Her husband knew nothing of all that was happening in the empire and was asleep. She, Eudoxia, was the one who effectively ruled both her husband and the entire empire. From this point of view Eudoxia was right.

The Senate also appreciated the justice of her request and declared her equal to her husband and all the emperors in Roman history. Eudoxia had a right to be venerated after the model of the other emperors, and not only her, but also her statues.

Statues that all citizens were obliged to adore and before which they had to place flowers and offerings. Statues that were the work of the greatest masters and for which the most expensive materials were used: statues in marble, bronze, gold, silver.

Each city had to possess at least one statue of the empress. Constantinople had to have one too, higher and more expensive than those of other cities. From this started the new quarrel between Eudoxia and John Goldenmouth.

The homily's power

To erect the statue of the empress, the main square of Constantinople was chosen. It was the largest square in the city. The statue was supposed to be erected in front of John's cathedral.

John didn't agree with the worship of imperial statues, but he couldn't change everything all at once by himself. He knew that in the future pagan cults would be abolished. In his homilies, he prepared the believers to become true Christians, he asked the emperors, if they were Christians, to stop pretending to be worshiped as gods, and the Christians to stop worshiping the imperial statues.

At the moment, he saw that the silver statue of Eudoxia was rising right in front of the church. Eudoxia was represented with her empress's insignia in a commanding attitude. This silver statue stood on a porphyry column. Although very tall, the statue, and the column that carried it, were placed on a huge marble plinth. In this way, the statue of Eudoxia dominated the church of Saint Sophia and the imperial palace as well as the whole city.

For its inauguration, they performed dances, songs, shows of all kinds, choirs, marching bands, orchestras. Rehearsals began once the statue was erected. They were fighters, acrobats, dancers, actors. This whole world was coming to rehearse. The place in front of the Saint Sophia church was full of people and hummed with the noise they were making.

The noise made by the artists, the dancers, the music, the choirs, the shouts that accompanied the battles were so strong that they could be heard inside the church, and John could no longer serve. In the middle of a prayer, the voice of an actress was heard; while the faithful were kneeling, dance music was heard. John believed that these offenses must stop. He addressed the prefect and explained the situation.

The prefect answered him in these terms: „Is not this the immemorial custom? Should we do less for our most venerable empress Eudoxia than has been done for all the caesars, and punish the enthusiasm which the people show for their sovereign?”.

The prefect told Eudoxia that John asked the people not to show their joy on the occasion of the inauguration of her statue. In agreement with Eudoxia, the prefect ordered even more enthusiastic festivities for the next day. In addition, he ordered to give the people something to drink. Let there be more music. And dance more.

John was forced to respond to this challenge through the only means he had: the homily. He gave a sermon in which he said everything he thought about statues, about the people who commissioned statues, about the pagan festivities required by the empress for the inauguration of her statue and ended with a quotation from the Bible, comparing Eudoxia with Salome, the daughter of Herodias (Marcu 6, 16-29). John Chrysostom told the people that he knew well that after this speech Salomea (ie Eudoxia) would ask for John's head, not the head of John the Baptist, but that of John Chrysostom. But he wasn't afraid of death, it was his duty to show what's sinful. What was happening, because of this statue in front of the church gate, was a scandal, it was a thing of hell; a mixture of sins that upset heaven.

John was not mistaken. Starting from the very next day, Eudoxia did everything necessary to take John Goldmouth's head. Exactly as Salomea had done to obtain the head of the other John, of Saint John the Baptist.

Eudoxia urgently invited to Constantinople all the bishops who had condemned John the Golden Mouth; but she knew that only one man was a master in the art of liquidations: Theophilus of Alexandria. A long letter was sent to the Christian pharaoh begging him to return to Constantinople to trial John Chrysostom. In this letter, Eudoxia swore to him that this time she wouldn't be a weak soul and would not call John Goldenmouth back, as she did the first time. She asked Theophilus to come and settle the „John Goldenmouth case" in his own way. In other words, to proceed with his liquidation.

The pretext for convening a new synod was already found. John Goldenmouth himself was asking for it. He wanted to be acquitted, and for this he asked the empress to set up a new synod. She was offering it to him now, not to acquit him, but to sentence him to death. This time, there will be no management.

Excommunication

The Egyptian bishops made their appearance again in Constantinople. Theophilus didn't come. After what had happened the first time, he swore to himself that he would never set foot in this city again. He wanted to serve Eudoxia, especially since it was about John's death, but he didn't want to risk being thrown into the sea once more. Theophilus sent all the instructions. In September of the year 403, on the occasion of the inauguration of the empress' statue, the bishops, who were supposed to make up the synod, were in Constantinople. They reunited shortly after the inaugural celebration.

From the very first meeting, before John Chrysostom's convocation, an egyptian stood up and asked the synod: „What have we come here to do?". The bishops answered in chorus that they had come together to judge and condemn John the Golden Mouth. The Egyptian smiled. And he explained that John was a non-existent person. Someone who doesn't exist cannot be called to appear before the judges. And with this logic worthy of Theophilus, the Egyptian told them that in year 341 (a few years before John's birth) a synod had been held in Antioch which had fixed certain canons by virtue of which John was automatically condemned. None of them knew these canons. The Egyptian invited the bishops to listen to the reading of canon 4 of the Antioch synod.

This fourth canon said: „Any bishop deposed from his seat, either justly or unjustly, by a synod, and who dares to ascend to it again on his own authority without having been excused from his condemnation by the same synod or by another, without having been recalled by his judges to his episcopal functions, without being allowed to justify himself, and anyone who would join him in his audacity or collaborate with him, should be excluded from the communion of the Church" (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*)

The egyptian bishop explained to the synod that there was nothing to judge. The Synod of Stejar, presided over by Theophilus, deposed John. Or, without being absolved by the Synod of Stejar, bishop John continued to be bishop of Constantinople. Therefore, he was automatically excommunicated and no longer had the right to ever address a synod. John wasn't only no longer a bishop, but he was also excommunicated. He claimed he was wrongfully convicted. This is not a justification. The fourth canon from Antioch clearly says that both those who were justly convicted and those who were unjustly convicted are excommunicated, and this without any right of appeal. The egyptian asked that the synod not be held. It was pointless. John no longer belonged to the Church. His entire activity after the conviction wasn't under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts, but of the police. The following canon, the fifth from Antioch, was clear in this regard: „If a priest or a bishop excluded from the Church (as was the case of John Chrysostom) continues to make disturbances, let him be repressed by the outside power (of the state) as a rebel".

The case of John Chrysostom was, therefore, not the responsibility of the Church, but of the police. For the Church, John Chrysostom was an excommunicated person who no longer had any right to appeal. The canons of the Church clearly stipulate that if an individual of his category causes disturbances, it must „request the help of the arm of the state" or the „power from outside", the police.

The logic was inexorable. The bishops of the synod didn't know the canons. There were many things they didn't know; but they just found out! They adjourned the meeting. The Synod announced that, according to the canons, John the Golden Mouth no longer existed for the Church, he was excommunicated, and no one had the right to be in contact with him. He was worse than a leper. The council suggested to the emperor Arcadius to finish once and for all with him.

The honest emperor

Empress Eudoxia agreed with the synod for the emergency punishment of John the Golden Mouth, who had insulted her silver statue; Arcadius asked what John thought about this situation. The emperor's messengers asked John what he thought about his own situation. Until then, it never occurred to anyone to ask him this question! John replied that everything the Egyptian synod - called by the empress - claimed was false.

First of all, the canons of the Synod of Antioch were heretical canons and an Orthodox assembly could not invoke them. The Synod of Antioch had been composed of 36 Arian bishops convened by the Arian emperor Constans.

Secondly, these canons didn't apply to him - Bishop John Golden Mouth - because he had never been condemned by a church synod. In this sense, John was right. The Synod of Stejar had not communicated his condemnation to John. An officer of the empress came to tell him to prepare for exile. Since the Synod of Stejar didn't communicate the punishment to him, it means that it didn't exist.

Third, his case couldn't be integrated into the fifth canon. In asking for a new trial, he was not asking to be reinstated in the positions from which he had never been excluded. He just wanted to „recover his innocence", to put an end to the slander, as is the duty of any bishop.

Arcadius said the second council was right. But John was also right. The emperor was a man of integrity. He gave justice to both sides and asked to be left alone. His conscience was calm. He had not harmed anyone.

The Emperor's tactics

During this time, since the emperor had not taken any measures, John the Golden Mouth continued his activity as head of the Church. The aristocracy, the rich, those who aspired to bright careers, no longer came to listen to his homilies. When Arcadius wanted to go to church, Eudoxia and the secular bishops informed him that he risked excommunication by entering the church of a convict. The emperor didn't go to church, he was docile. Still he wanted to pray but everyone prevented him from going to church.

Finally, the emperor was forced to order John Chrysostom to be exiled. Immediately after signing the exile order, he reversed his decision. He wondered if, by chance, John was innocent. And ordering the exile of an innocent and holy bishop, Arcadius could expect a harsh punishment from God. He thought that he could fall out of bed, that he could get a disease, that he could burn alive, among other things. So he returned to his decision. And he gave the following order: for the moment, John was not to leave his house. He had forced residence in his own house. John Chrysostom no longer had the right to enter a church.

And during this time, the emperor Arcadius observed whether God was angry with this decision. If He was angry, He would send him a punishment. Seeing the divine anger, the emperor would have immediately ordered the release of the saint, in five minutes the saint could be free! But if in the meantime God was not angry and did not punish the emperor, this meant that God agreed to send John into exile. Arcadius confessed to Eudoxia his tactic of testing God.

House arrest

The emperor ordered John's arrest in his own house. At the same time, he was carefully observing God's reaction in front of this decision. It seemed that God didn't send any punishment. There was no earthquake, no storm, no epidemic. From this, Arcadius deduced that God approved of John Chrysostom's arrest.

Since he had divine consent, Arcadius allowed Eudoxia to send John into exile. The emperor could promise these things to his beautiful wife because he was convinced that God would not protect John the Golden Mouth. If God were John's friend, if He were his protector, He would've sent a sign. But God didn't send any sign.

The empress and the members of the aristocracy of Constantinople were anxious to see John the Golden Mouth gone. The emperor, on the other hand, wanted to delay the execution of the sentence. Arcadius had found that God was not angry with the condemnation of John Chrysostom. But he was a cautious man. He knew that God could be angry later. Arcadius therefore sought to postpone the execution of the sentence by all possible measures and to remain on good terms with John and with God. He sent a lieutenant to John to invite him to conclude a truce with the emperor. Arcadius pledged not to harm him or the poor he supported, and he, in turn, had to promise not to enter the church for the duration of the truce in order to avoid any violence and bloodshed. The bishop knew that if he refused this truce, the emperor would use violence to make him leave the church and that there would be bloody battles between the people and the police. So he agreed not to go to church anymore. John kept his word and the emperor kept his word. The terms of the truce were respected by both sides.

But the Easter holidays were approaching. Through the window, John could see the crowd of believers standing guard in front of the bishopric/episcopate/diocese. And then John had terrible remorse. He understood that he should never have made a truce with the emperor. He shouldn't leave the faithful without a shepherd. He had to go to church at any cost, every day. He had to be present at the altar even if for this he had to pay with his death and the death of the faithful. Death is not something to fear for Christians. It's not a danger. Only sin is. Especially at this moment, in the days leading up to Holy Easter. And John decided to go to church. Without hesitation, he broke his word to the emperor. He didn't want to please men, but God. You can't do both at once. So he entered the church and began to celebrate the Passion Saturday service.

The news spread throughout the city. Eudoxia woke her husband and said to him: „It is your duty to remove from the church a deposed and excommunicated intruder. You cannot have communion with this man, nor let your family and the people, for whom you are responsible, have communion with him". To which Arcadius replied: „But if the bishop is a saint, then I will commit a sin".

During this time, John Goldenmouth was performing the Liturgy. Before it ended, the emperor sent him the order to leave the church. John then answered the imperial envoys:

„I cannot leave the church. I have received this church from God Hi mself, my Savior, to take care of His flock. I will not desert" (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*).

The officer threatened to expel him by force. The saint answered: „If the emperor wants, then let him force me out, because the city belongs to him. Violence will be my excuse before God, but I will never leave here willingly" (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*).

In good relations with God

The emperor called Antiochus and Acachie, the two bishops who had sentenced John Golden Mouth to death, and said to them: „Do yourselves what remains for me to do".

The emperor didn't want to stain his hands with blood on Holy Saturday. The emperor feared God, as he also feared Eudoxia, his beautiful wife. He didn't want to displease God and use force inside the church. But the two bishops were less Christian than the emperor. They assured Arcadius that they were in close touch with God. The two bishops explained to the emperor that they visited God daily „for reasons of service". They advised the emperor to use force: „We take his condemnation upon our heads" (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*).

In this case, Arcadius had nothing left to lose. He ordered the massacre in the church premises and, despite all this, he will be able to appear before Jesus with clean hands, without any trace of blood, since sin and blood will only stain the hands and souls of the bishops. Arcadius continued to have good relations with God. As a result, he ordered the arrest of the saint and of those who opposed his arrest.

The army and the police were declared on alert, as in war, and armed with spears and swords. The army set out to take the cathedral by storm.

Terror and massacre

Apart from the faithful attending the service in the Saint Sophia Cathedral on that Easter Saturday, there were also, when the storming of the church was ordered, several thousand catechumens dressed in white waiting to be baptized. When the soldiers appeared, armed to the teeth, some of the catechumens, men, women, children, were already in the water of the baptistery. The soldiers invaded the baptistery. The priests dressed in their liturgical vestments were thrown into the water of the baptistery and exterminated, and „the waters of the rebirth of people became red with the blood of people" (*Letter to bishop Inocențiu*).

The faithful left the church, left the baptistery and ran naked along the streets of Constantinople. The soldiers advanced step by step, because they had orders to storm the church. They first occupied the baptistery, then the altar. The soldiers destroyed the priests, the faithful and those who were waiting for Christ's Baptism.

In a short time, the Saint Sophia church was emptied of living people. The faithful hid in the basements. Some were no longer hiding anywhere: they wanted the Liturgy to continue its course, and the catechumens wanted to receive Baptism despite the massacre and terror ordered by the emperor.

Bishops will cover „the business”

While the soldiers were leaving the church dragging Saint John Chrysostom in their way, like a criminal, the catechumens gathered in the public baths of the city at the baths of Constans to receive Baptism. The priests and believers installed an altar here and continued the ceremony. Some of those who were at that time in Constans' baths had fresh wounds, sword blows, spear blows, punch marks or club blows. But they wanted to become Christians. They wanted to receive the Baptism of Christ. And they all sang songs of praise to the Lord, so that the city resounded with them.

During this time, John was arrested. Learning that the altar was defiled, and that the waters of the Baptism were red with blood, the emperor was frightened. He was afraid of angering God. But he was assured that the bishops would take this sin upon themselves.

However, Arcadius was afraid. But the bishops were dissatisfied with the progress of the operation. They reckoned that the action had lacked energy. The faithful had not been massacred to the last. Because the priests, the faithful, the catechumens who were waiting for baptism were not exterminated until the last one, the bishops considered that the action, ordered by the emperors, had not been crowned with success. It was a failure. The soldiers were guilty of not carrying out the emperor's order to the end.

The bishops went to the prefect of the city, the „master of offices” named Anthemius, and asked him to continue the action ordered by the emperor, the enemies being alive and continuing to be baptized at the baths of Constans. Prefect Anthemius hesitated. The bishops threatened to denounce him to the emperor for lack of courage and tenacity in military actions.

When he saw how much hatred and cruelty these bishops were capable of, Anthemius looked them in the eye. He knew that no officer would be capable of such ferocity. There were many pagan officers in Constantinople. Most of them were pagans of barbarian origin. But Anthemius knew his officers and knew that not one of them would be able to carry out the massacre ordered by the bishops. He replied to the old bishop Acachie and bishop Antiochus that he was providing them with soldiers and police, but that he was asking them to take over the command of this operation to assassinate the Christians in Constans' baths.

These units commanded by priests patrolled the streets of Constantinople heading towards the baths to massacre the men and women who had come to be baptized. The troops commanded by bishops, priests and deacons, interrupted the Baptism ceremony that was taking place inside the baths. The number of dead was higher than in the cathedral. It was Holy Saturday, the eve of Easter. The troops, led by the bishops, continued the massacre.

The effect of fresh air

In his palace, the emperor was tormented by remorse. Eudoxia forcibly took him for a walk outside the city to make him forget what was happening. She made the emperor to go outside the city, offering him air and exercise. While Eudoxia was trying to distract her husband, 42 bishops, countless priests and deacons came to meet him. These bishops, priests and deacons fell on their knees before the imperial carriage and begged Arcadius to order an end to the massacre. The emperor was sleeping in the golden carriage. Eudoxia was right: the air was good for the emperor who reconciled with his conscience.

Arcadius was sleeping peacefully because the sin of this horrible massacre won't be recorded on his record as a Christian, as he falsely believed, but on the records of bishops Acachie and Antiochus. The individual sheet, the Christian record of the emperor will be white as snow when he will appear before God at the moment of supreme judgment, because at that moment Arcadius had a reconciled conscience, he didn't even open his eyes to look at the 42 bishops kneeling in front of the imperial carriage. He saw and heard them in his sleep. But Eudoxia was not sleeping. She was standing upright with her head up, next to her sleeping husband. Eudoxia arrogantly listened to the kneeling bishops. All those who were massacred at that moment, all those who had been massacred and all those who will be massacred in the future, deserved death. They deserved to be killed for criticizing the beautiful silver statue of the empress.

„Eudoxia, have mercy on your children and do not stain the holy feast of Christ with blood” said a bishop. Eudoxia looked at him with contempt and ordered the visitor to start. All 42 of the holy bishops remained kneeling on the road, petrified.

The road to heaven

A few minutes after leaving the kneeling bishops on the road, Emperor Arcadius opened his eyes. He saw in the middle of the field a lot of people in white. They were the survivors of the massacre at the thermal baths. These pagans who wanted to embrace Christianity tried to be baptized in the cathedral, but were driven away. They tried to continue the Baptism ceremony in the public baths. And there the army attacked them also. Some of them were assassinated. And those who survived the two massacres were now outside the city, in the open air and continuing the Baptism ceremony. Because they wanted to become Christians at any cost. At that time, the Baptism ceremony lasted several days, involving vigils, fasting and a whole complicated ceremonial.

The emperor asked Eudoxia who were those men and women in white clothes in the middle of the field. She replied that they were sectarians. Arcadius remembered that he was an emperor and his mission as a Christian emperor was to defend the Church of Christ against external enemies and sectarians. Arcadius immediately ordered that there be no more sectarians. He specified that the heretics had to be eliminated by a charge of cavalry. The order was executed. Armed with long lances, the imperial cavalry came galloping and stormed the crowd of people dressed in white.

The massacre was terrible. While the cavalry massacred the catechumens gathered in the field at the place called Fifth Milestone, in the city, the infantry, led by the bishops, continued the extermination. The prisons were filled to capacity. The manhunt continued all night and in the following days. On the night of the Resurrection, the most terrible raid was carried out.

The brother of Arcadius, who was emperor at Rome, sent messengers to Constantinople in fear. Honorius, the emperor of Rome, told his brother that this crime committed on the night of the Resurrection was the most heinous crime; on the night of the Resurrection, the Christian emperors open the prison gates and let the guilty go free, not kill people.

Honorius wrote to his brother Arcadius: „The churches were surrounded at once (in Constantinople) and the priests taken prisoners, so that during the time when the kings open the prisons, the gates of the dungeons, (in your empire) they closed in on the servants of a law of love and peace. Several believers were massacred even in the sanctuaries... the Holy Mysteries were defiled with human blood, a terrible thing".

Among the arrested priests, bishops and deacons was the bishop John Goldenmouth. He had been imprisoned.

„Through many troubles we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts of the Apostles 14, 22). The road to heaven also passes through prison. Now in prison, John continues his journey to heaven.

Chapter 12

West versus East

The golden mouth of the holy bishop had been closed. It was closely guarded. Eudoxia made sure that John didn't communicate with anyone. However, he managed to send a letter to bishop Innocent to beg for help, not for him personally, but for the Church of Christ defiled by Eudoxia, the woman with the silver statue. John wrote to the bishop as follows:

„We suppose that before the arrival of this letter, the rumor of the assassination committed here reached the ears of your piety. Indeed, the crime is so great, that there is not a corner of the world that is not outraged by this story. Everywhere it has caused long mourning and sighing".

In this letter, John tells bishop Innocent the facts as they happened. He asks him to intervene to rectify this situation: „Since these heinous crimes not only demand regrets and tears, they also demand prompt remedies, it must be carefully investigated how this storm, that shakes the Church, can be calmed".

John Chrysostom sent the letter through four bishops and two deacons: „I have exhorted my lords, the most honest and venerable prelates Demetrius, Pausofius, Pappus and Eugenius, to leave their flocks in order to entrust themselves to the sea, and, after a long journey, to run to your love, to explain things to you in detail and to ask your thoughts for an effective remedy for our pains. I gave them as a companion travel to the dear and honest deacons Paul and Chiriac who, in the absence of letters, will verbally present to your love all the information you will want".

This delegation went to Rome by sea, although this journey was longer. They didn't take the land routein order to avoid being attacked by Eudoxia's men.

Bishop Innocent answered with the Olympian calm of a prince of the Church who rules according to the clock of eternity, not according to that of history.

First, bishop Innocent confirmed to John Chrysostom that both synods that condemned him were not legally constituted, from the point of view of church canons. Therefore, the condemnation they pronounced against John wasn't valid. The bishop promised John Chrysostom to convene a legal synod according to the canons of the Church, which will judge the bishop of Constantinople. At this synod, Theophilus, the Christian pharaoh of Alexandria, will be invited as a witness and not as a judge.

Regarding the moral and physical sufferings of John Chrysostom, bishop Innocent wrote: „As a teacher and shepherd of the people, you do not need me to teach you that the most virtuous people have always been the most tested, so that they show themselves unconquered by suffering, steadfast in the most difficult and unjust torments".

Bishop Innocent presented the cause of John the Golden Mouth to Emperor Honorius. And the sovereign of Rome promised his help to the bishop to do justice to John the Golden Mouth. After which, the emperor Honorius wrote to Arcadius, his brother from Constantinople, summoning him to do justice to the bishop. By associating with bishop Innocent, the entire West promised its help to do justice to the bishop of the East.

The passion with which the emperor of Rome defended John Chrysostom was not disinterested. Sovereigns and politicians are never disinterested. Honorius wanted to take advantage of the righteous cause of the bishop in order to interfere in the internal affairs of the Eastern Roman Empire. The pretext of this interference was sublime: the injustice to which a bishop had fallen victim.

Eudoxia and the politicians from Constantinople understood the intentions of the West empire. Arcadius' court was in a panic. The synod convened by the bishop for the rehabilitation of John the Golden Mouth was a terrible blow to the East empire. Arcadius was advised to prevent at all costs the establishment of this synod. But it was impossible to prevent the bishop from doing justice where injustice haunted. The Bishop of Rome was an incorruptible character who, in his earthly activity, sought to please God, not men: since the bishop had decided to convene a synod and rehabilitate John Chrysostom, this meant that nothing could prevent him from doing this justice.

The ladies from the aristocracy suggested to Eudoxia a way to prevent the convening of the synod in Rome: the emergency suppression of John Goldenmouth. If the bishop disappeared, the synod in Rome had no one to rehabilitate.

At the imperial palace in Constantinople, all other activities were put aside to prepare John's assassination. The Eastern Roman Empire knew only one problem: the discreet and urgent assassination of Saint John the Golden Mouth.

Assassination = trivial event

Eudoxia and the ladies of the aristocracy of the Eastern empire summoned Acachie, and Antiochus, as well as all the bishops who were John's enemies and informed them of their plan to assassinate him. They asked the bishops if they were at risk of being punished by God for the death of bishop John.

They had arranged in detail how to kill John Goldenmouth, but they were afraid when it came to executing the plan. They feared God above all. The bishops assured Eudoxia and her aristocratic girlfriends that the assassination of John Chrysostom would not upset God.

Encouraged by the bishop, the aristocrats of Constantinople, led by Empress Eudoxia, decided to proceed with the execution of the plan to assassinate John Chrysostom.

Hiring the assassin

With the help of the police of Constantinople, the ladies of the imperial court and the bishops tried to find a „paid killer”. The character recommended by the police was a man who could kill with great skill. He was therefore hired to assassinate John and was given a deposit. The killer was an experienced man. It wasn't his first crime.

However, right from the beginning he ran into some difficulties that seemed insurmountable. The episcopal palace where John was held captive was guarded by the police. The police were ordered not to see anything when the assassin entered John's cell and, as far as possible, the police had to open the doors and help him in fulfilling his mission. The difficulty, however, was that the bishop wasn't only guarded by the police; he was also guarded by his believers. Day and night the crowd of the poor of Constantinople gathered around the episcopal palace watching over the saint's life. Gathered around the palace, the proletarians of Constantinople, barefoot, oppressed, watched so that nothing happened to the saint. The supervision carried out by these ragtags was perfect. The assassin couldn't enter the palace without being seen by the defenders of the saint.

The failure of the assassination

For several weeks, the assassin tried to break into John's cell. But it was impossible for him to slip through the ranks of the poor who guarded their protector. Eudoxia was in a hurry to have the saint's head cut off. The killer was summoned not to delay. Then, the assassin resorted to a scam. He came in front of the gate of the bishopric and there he threw himself on the ground simulating an epileptic fit. People passing by watched the assassin writhe in convulsions. It was a common sight in Constantinople. At that time, when a man fell in the street, the emergency service wasn't called. He was left to struggle in the dust, no one approached him; people knew that, once the crisis was over, the man would rise up on his own.

In his convulsions, the assassin managed to sneak into the courtyard of the bishopric, then, still struggling, he reached the door of the cell where John lived. He opened the gate and wanted to enter. At that moment the assassin was stopped by a faithful servant of the bishop who grabbed him from behind. He was interrogated. He confessed, without much hesitation, that he had been hired to kill John Goldenmouth. The assassin even showed the dagger with which he was to kill him. He asked for forgiveness. He said he was poor and a poor man has to do all kinds of jobs to earn his bread.

The news of the attempt to assassinate the bishop spread everywhere in the city, then throughout the empire. The poor people settled around the episcopal palace. The teams of poor people guarding the bishop were doubled. No bird could've entered John's cell. The imperial police also went to the bishop. Although the killer was hired by the police himself, he had to be convicted to save appearances. He was therefore put in chains and taken to the city prison. Eudoxia was furious to see that the assassination plan had failed.

In his room, John remained thoughtful for a moment. He had escaped from death. Since he was alive, he had to continue his fight for the Church. He asked for paper and ink. He wrote a petition to the prefect of the city, begging for the release and forgiveness of the man who wanted to attempt his life. The police hastily approved the bishop's petition, and the murderer was set free.

The assassin chosen by the bishops

During this time, bishop Innocent sent a summons to the bishops in order to set up a synod to rehabilitate John the Golden Mouth. Frightened by the idea that John might be rehabilitated and reappear in the pulpit to preach against them, the aristocrats of Constantinople hired a new assassin. This time they got hold of one of the empire's most skilled assassins. On this occasion, the ladies of the palace appealed to the bishops, and the bishops proved to be more ferocious than the police in this regard. They chose an assassin who was a real specialist, „a tough guy”. The first criminal, recommended by the police, was an amateur compared to the assassin chosen by the bishops. The one who hired this hitman was the priest Elpidius. He paid the new criminal fifty gold coins as a deposit, wishing him success in his mission to kill the bishop. Eudoxia waited hour by hour for the news of John's death. She received the assurance that this time the plan would succeed. The man employed for this purpose was already in the field. The assassin had donned the clothes of a commission agent. He entered the courtyard of the episcopal palace with cool blood and confidence. One of the proletarians who were on guard stopped him to examine him and see if he was not armed.

The commissioner took out his knife and with the skill of a master plunged it precisely into the heart of the volunteer guard. The operation lasted a few seconds. The commissioner didn't even slow down. He killed the Christian guard and continued his way with the same step, heading towards the saint's cell. But in front of the gate were other faithful guards. They also wanted to stop the commissioner, to make sure that he wasn't armed. There were four guards. In cold blood, without hesitation, the commissioner hired by the priest Elpidius plunged the knife with lightning speed into the heart of the first guard, then into the heart of the second, then into the third… into the fourth. The crimes were executed with such speed that no one, none of the Christian guards had time to react.

The commissioner had left behind him, in the bishop's yard, four corpses and one seriously injured. When he plunged his dagger into the fifth guard's heart, the assassin missed by a few millimeters. It did not touch the heart directly, and the man was not dead, the victim survived and was able to cry out. At the wounded man's cries, other ragged men who were on guard came running closer. The criminal commissioner was surrounded by the crowd. He still managed to open his way by killing two more people. There were seven bodies so far, seven people had been killed in just a few minutes.

The crowd gathered, as usual, around the bishop. They managed to capture the assassin. Three knives were found on him. He had used all three. The assassin immediately declared that he had been hired by the venerable Elpidius to kill the bishop and that he had received from the hand of the abbot the sum of fifty gold coins, the rest to be given to him after the murder. The killer was handed over to the police. The police led him outside of Constantinople and released him.

The order of exile

With the help of the clergy, Eudoxia thus tried several times to liquidate John. But without results. Seeing that the saint couldn't be assassinated, Acachie, Antioch and the other bishops, who were John's enemies, went to the emperor to beg him to liquidate the bishop. Emperor Arcadius hesitated, as usual. The bishops said to him: „Your majesty, you have been made king by God... that you may be allowed to do whatever you like; do not be more tolerant than the priests and holier than the bishops" (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*).

At that moment Eudoxia arrived. She lied her husband that if there was a sin in this condemnation, the holy bishops would take the sin upon themselves, and that the emperor might present himself without blemish before God, and God would give Arcadius the most comfortable place in heaven.

However, Emperor Arcadius said that he preferred to sign an order of exile. The bishops were satisfied with this as well. The main thing was to get John Chrysostom out of Constantinople. Once this problem was solved, the assassination could be considered as done.

Farewell

On June 7, 404, 15 days before Pentecost, John was looking out the window. It wasn't day yet. But the episcopal palace was surrounded by the army and the crowd. John said his prayers and calmly waited for God's will to be fulfilled. Towards noon, an imperial official, named Patricius, arrived at the bishop's house. And the official commanded the bishop: „Entrust yourself to God and get out of here without delay" (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*).

John remained calm. A saint is calm even before death. Patricius explained to the him: „Acachie, Antiochus, Cyrinus and Severian took upon themselves the responsibility of your condemnation".

John didn't respond to this explanation. He made a sign to those around him that he wanted, before leaving, to enter the church Saint Sophia to pray.

The imperial official Patricius didn't oppose his request. John invited all the bishops, priests and deacons who were pr esent to accompany him to the church: „Come, let us pray and say goodbye to the angel of this church".

The angel of the church left with him also

It was the last time John Chrysostom prayed in this church. Patricius sent him the order to go into exile. But John knew that the exile was only a pretext. Empress Eudoxia wanted to kill him during the journey. This time the decision to assassinate him had been made.

While the saint was praying, a deacon slipped a letter into his hand: a friend begged John Chrysostom to interrupt his prayer and leave the church in a hurry. The military commander Lucius had received orders from Eudoxia to simulate resistance on the part of the saint, to attack the church and kill him. The friend begged the saint to leave the church in a hurry to thwart Eudoxia's murderous plan and save his life.

Palladius preserved the text of this letter: „Hurry! Lucius, this shameless-faced and exceedingly bold man, is not far from here in the public baths, ready to take you by force if you refuse or delay your departure. The people of the city are in a state of extreme excitement. Make haste to go out secretly for fear of a collision and bloodshed between him and the soldiers".

John interrupted his prayer. His first thought was to avoid bloodshed. John loved the poor, the ragged and humble, and he died with every man who died. He wanted to save their lives. Because of this, John calmly ordered to put the saddle on his horse and to stand ready for departure in front of the west gate of the bishopric. Seeing John's horse with the saddle on for departure, the people would've waited for him in front of this gate, while he would've gone out through another. After giving this order, John approached the bishops. He hugged two of them. „I embrace you all in their person. Stay in the altar so I can calm down a little before I leave".

The bishop left his brother priests and bishops in the altar. Then he went alone to the baptistery where the deaconesses were gathered and called Olimpiada, Ampructa, Salvina and Pendatia. He said: „Come, my daughters, and listen well. For me it is all over. My running is over". The deaconesses cried. He continued: „I have only one thing to advice you: none of you should deviate from the respect you owe to the Church. Whoever ends up being ordained as bishop, without intrigue and without ambitions, and becomes my successor, submit to him as you did to me, because the Church cannot be without a bishop".

John then addressed a request to the deaconesses: „Have mercy and remember me, my daughters, in your prayers" (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*). Crying, the deaconesses threw themselves at the saint's feet and kissed the edge of his garment and shoes trying to prevent him from leaving. The bishop tried to tear himself a way from the crowd of deaconesses, but it was too difficult. He called a priest and asked for his help to remove them. „Remove them, so that their sorrow may not trouble the people".

The bishop crossed the cathedral with measured steps. Slow, calmly, he left the church. The horse and the crowd were waiting for him at the west gate. The bishop went out through the east gate and there he surrendered to the soldiers who wrapped him in a cloak so that the crowd would not recognize him. The east gate of the bishopric closed behind him.

Bishop Palladius, biographer and friend of Saint John the Golden Mouth, writes that the angel of the cathedral left the church on the east gate of the diocese of Constantinople: „The angel of the church left with him".

Chapter 13

The fire

The crowd didn't see John leaving the church. The crowd of the poor, the ragged, the wretched, was waiting for John at the western gate, where his horse was ready for departure. The crowd would've waited for him for a long time if they hadn't heard cries coming from inside the cathedral. After the bishop's arrest, the soldiers began to chase away the deaconesses, priests and deacons. The soldiers wanted to evacuate the church from all John's partisans. The crowd heard the cries and thought they were torturing John. The poor then tried to enter the cathedral to save their protector from torture but the cathedral doors were locked.

Seeing that they could not enter the church, the crowd gathered around the Saint Sophia Cathedral demolished the walls. They were high walls like a fortress. The people came with axes, picks, all kinds of tools and the walls were torn down. Empress Eudoxia sent all the detachments of soldiers and police of Constantinople to prevent the crowd from entering the church, but it was too late. The walls of the cathedral had been breached, the people were already inside. The soldiers had orders to defend the church. Not only the Christians came to save John; jews and pagans have also ran to the church to participate in the rescue of the bishop and to fight against the army. John the Golden Mouth was the protector of all proletarians (poor people) in Constantinople, even jews or pagans. And now these proletarians of all religions were coming to save him from the hands of the police.

But John was already on the road to exile. During the fight that was going on in the cathedral yard, on the stairs and inside the church, in the baptistery and around the altar, a storm suddenly broke out. It was a storm coming from the north, from the Black Sea, and it was so violent that it tore off the roofs of the houses. The fight continued desperately with the same violence as the storm. During this, a fire broke out. The pulpit, where John Goldenmouth preached, caught fire. Fueled by the wind blowing from the north, the flames consumed the pulpit in a second. From the pulpit the fire spread into the altar. The altar of the Saint Sophia cathedral was also consumed by flames. After which the whole church was turned into ashes.

From the cathedral, the fire spread to neighboring buildings. While the last walls of the cathedral were burning, the fire reached the prefecture palace. The prefecture had a metal roof, and the metal was melting and flowing like hot lava. Carried by the wind, the fire consumed one by one the houses of the neighborhood and was heading towards the imperial palace at breakneck speed. It would've been said that the fire wanted to destroy, as quickly as possible, the palace in which were Eudoxia and the women who had sent John to his death. And while the flames consumed half of Constantinople, the soldiers escorted John Chrysostom as a criminal on the road to Nicaea.

The fire perpetrators

A large part of the city was reduced to ashes. Then the fire was extinguished. The fight between the crowd and the police has stopped. After restoring calm, the police began to mistreat and arrest the citizens faithful to John. In order to arrest the arsonists, the police had to determine when the fire broke out. Only one fact was certain: the fire that had destroyed the cathedral, the prefecture's palace and several quarters of Constantinople to the ground first destroyed the pulpit from where the great orator of the Christian Church preached. It was the pulpit that burned first. From there the fire broke out. The police couldn't determine when the pulpit caught fire.

The historian Sozomen tells that there were 20 variants regarding the time of the pulpit fire. The police wanted to know who the perpetrators of the fire were. The police prefect was a certain Studius and he had orders from Eudoxia to find the arsonists at any cost. Of the 20 variants that were circulating, prefect Studius retained four.

The first hypothesis was that the church was set on fire by John's partisan bishops when the soldiers were taking him out of the church. The bishops would've set fire to the pulpit so that no one could preach from there.

According to the second version, the church would've been set on fire by jews and pagans. Lately, Christians had burned numerous temples and taking advantage of the fight between the Christians and the police, the pagans and the jews would've taken revenge by also burning a Christian cathedral.

According to the third version, Saint Sophia would've been set on fire, as a revenge, by the poor people of Constantinople, whose only protector, bishop John Goldenmouth, had been taken away from them.

According to the fourth version, Saint Sophia would've been set on fire, as punishment for the saint's arrest, by God Himself, Who would've let a bolt of lightning fall into the pulpit.

Prefect Studius was in a difficult situation. The alleged arsonists of the cathedral were difficult to arrest: jews and pagans were accused together. Prefect Studius couldn't arrest all the jews and all the pagans. Bishops, priests and deacons were then accused. And they were numerous and couldn't all be arrested, no more than the poor who constituted the majority of the population of Constantinople. God, the heavenly Father Himself, was accused of setting the church on fire with lightning. Prefect Studius could not even arrest God. So he ordered to arrest as many people as possible, and first of all the best friends of the saint. But the saint's best friends had willingly gone into exile with him. Studius sent the cavalry to catch up with the exiled saint's convoy and seize all those who accompanied him.

The road of exile

The convoy that escorted John on the road to exile was far from Constantinople. The guards had been ordered to take the saint away as quickly as possible.

The place where he was exiled was not communicated to him. Embarked in Constantinople, disembarked at Chalcedon, he was now taken on the road to Nicaea, without stopping, dragged by the guards in a forced march.

Before it arrived at Nicaea, the convoy was overtaken by the knights sent by the empress. The police seized bishops Chiriac and Eulysius. The bishops were put in chains. Both were faithful to John Chrysostom and had voluntarily gone into exile so as not to leave the saint alone. And now they could no longer accompany the saint in his exile. They were put in chains. The priests and deacons accompanying the saint were also arrested. All those who accompanied him on the path of his torment were arrested. John suddenly found himself alone among the soldiers. The saint protested and asked to let him also be chained. The historian Sozomen writes that the saint said: „I will not separate from my brothers".

The imperial envoy replied that John's friends were under arrest because they had set fire to the cathedral of Saint Sophia and the city of Constantinople. „If they are guilty, then I am guilty", said the bishop. „If they are the instruments of a crime, then I must be the its author or instigator".

John begged the imperial envoy to put his hands and feet in chains, as they did with his friends. „I must be interrogated, so that my friends and enemies may well know whether I am a firestarter or not".

The Imperial envoys didn't want to hear anything of it. So they arrested John's friends, whom they sent to Constantinople, from station to station, in chains like assassins; John was left alone with the guards.

John didn't know where they were leading him. He was being dragged endlessly towards the east. The heat was unbearable. John Chrysostom fell ill before reaching Nicaea. He had a high fever. „He was frail. The sadness, the heat, the loneliness, the lack of water and food, as well as the fatigue of the journey brought him down". Around him there were only soldiers armed to the teeth.

Beyond the plates, spears, galloons, beyond the uniforms of soldiers and officers, John managed to discover people. In the depths of their being covered with decorations, galleons and emblems, he discovered the soul of the soldiers and officers of his escort. The commanders were called Anatol and Teodor. John noticed that they had a soul, because they felt sorry for the bishop whom they were ordered to take on a forced march to an unknown place.

At each stop, despite the empress' stern orders to persecute him to death, the officers and soldiers of the escort sought water, bread, and milk for the prisoner instead of resting.

John couldn't live without washing. At each stop, the officers looked for a barrel, filled it with water and invited him to take a bath. The more they advanced on the path of exile, the more the friendship between the saint and the soldiers grew.

Finally, the officers and soldiers who escorted him were no longer John's guardians and jailers, but his faithful servants. John softened the heart of the guards. It was one of his greatest miracles. Because discovering a heart in a soldier or policeman, is a miracle as great as turning stone into bread. And John Goldenmouth did this miracle.

The soldier or officer in the escort who had a glass of fresh water or a glass of milk, or a piece of bread, didn't keep them for himself; he brought them to John. The goodness and holiness of bishop John amazed the soldiers, and the soldiers became human. Turning a policeman into a human is as rare a miracle as turning water into wine. On the road to exile, John Chrysostom performed a miracle: he converted the jailers and policemen sent to persecute him. He changed the policemen into people.

The tortures of the Ioannites. Eutropius

After the saint's deportation, the persecution of his followers in Constantinople began. John's partisans were poor Christians, priests and deacons, bishops and faithful women, those who did not fear death.

The Ioannites (name given to John Chrysostom's friends) didn't tremble before Studius, the prefect of Constantinople. Because of this, the prefect was gripped by a feeling of unease. Studius led the investigation and the tortures without passion. This lack of passion, this absence of cruelty irritated the four bishops enemies of John Chrysostom: Severian, Acachie, Antiochus and Quirinus.

The four prelates, accompanied by Eudoxia, appeared before the emperor and denounced the indulgence of the prefect. They asked the emperor for a cruel prefect who could tear the accused's skin to pieces - until they would confess everything they were asked to confess. Advised by the prelates, the emperor Arcadius deposed Studius and appointed another prefect, whose name was Optatus. Optatus was a policeman who read Greek poets and philosophers. After his appointment, he made it known that he would personally lead the investigation. Then he announced that he would not proceed with this investigation in the police premises, as his colleagues did, but in the forum, under the eyes of the crowd, in the main city square.

Optatus has set up an office in the center of the market. Near his desk he installed the entire arsenal of instruments of torture. Each device had a craftsman who made it work. There were craftsmen tasked with crushing bones, others tasked with tearing skin, others burning with red iron, others pulling nails.

As before a theater scene, seats for spectators were installed in front of the prefect and the torturers. The bishops and ladies of the court wanted to attend the spectacle. The aristocracy had reserved seats.

Historians Sozomen and Paladie, both contemporaries of the events, tell us that the first interrogated was a young reader of the church of John the Golden Mouth, named Eutropius. He was a teenager. John Golden Mouth had protected him for his faith and purity. Eutropius was still in his infancy, and his face was still white and clean, without a shadow of a moustache. She was the first person the intellectual prefect Optatus made to appear before his terrible tribunal. Eutropius was summoned to tell the story of the circumstances in which John Chrysostom set fire to the Church. He replied that he didn't see John Chrysostom setting fire to the church. He was telling the truth. Eutropius didn't see either John, the bishops, or the deaconesses setting the church on fire: „I don't know anything about everything you ask me", he answered with candor and sincerity (*Palade, Dialogues about the life of Saint John Chrysostom*).

Optatus ordered Eutropius to be laid on the torture table. The master torturers began to hit him with sticks of all sizes, so that he wouldn't be spared of any suffering. Thick sticks that reach to the bone, fine straw-like sticks that hit the skin like blades.

After being thus beaten, Eutropius was asked if he wanted to tell how John set fire to the Church. „I know nothing of what you ask me" he answered. It was the same phrase he had said before. Palladius wrote down the words of Eutropius according to the testimonies of those who heard them and witnessed his torture. Optatus ordered that the young man be transferred to another executioner. He tortured his bones. Then he was asked again if he wanted to testify how the church was set on fire by the bishop. White as lime from suffering and barely whispering, Eutropius answered: „I know nothing of all that you ask me".

The tortures continued with the red iron. Then the witness was questioned again: „Do you testify how the bishop set fire to the church?”. This time Eutropius gave no reply. He said everything he had to say. Optatus ordered that the witness be transferred again to another executioner. Then to another. To the right of the prefect sat a full team of torturers. The prefect himself was a specialist in torture. But in spite of all the tortures, Eutropius gave no further reply.

The torture continued for a long time and the witness remained silent, although the executioners passed him from hand to hand. Later, one of the torturers noticed that Eutropius was dead. He had been dead for a long time. His body was already cold. The executioners had tortured the body of Eutropius. Optatus had tortured a dead man. Eutropius was the first witness killed during the investigation. The number of those killed during the interrogation was very high. The body of the young man remained in the forum all day. During the night, he was thrown into a pit by Acachie and the four bishops. During the night, the bishops lifted the corpses from the square and buried them, hiding themselves so that they wouldn't be lynched by the crowd.

Tigrius and Serapion

The second witness brought before Optatus, to accuse John Chrysostom of burning the cathedral, was Tigrius. The priest Tigrius was the slave who had spent all his life economizing on food and clothing, saving penny after penny, and, buying his freedom, had become a monk and priest. Tigrius's gratitude to John Chrysostom was so great that he would've preferred to be cut to pieces, millimeter by millimeter, rather than speak anything but words of praise to the exiled bishop. On the torture table, before the aristocracy and the bishop, Tigrius had all his fingers and toes crushed, one after the other. He was beaten with lead whips until his skin was torn off, hanging on his body like pieces of cloth. Despite all these tortures, as long as he had the strength to speak, Tigrius did nothing but proclaim that Bishop John was a saint.

The prefect was displeased. He looked for other witnesses. The prefect especially looked for Serapion, the first deacon of John Chrysostom. Serapion had been the saint's right hand, his assistant. When the persecution broke out, Serapion took refuge in the Carpathians, in today's Romania. This country was occupied by the Goths and was called Gotia, but the population was mostly Daco-Roman, the country being colonized by the emperor Trajan. The Goths had been Christianized by their great bishop Ulfila. When the Huns arrived, part of the Goth people moved to the south of the Danube. The emperor of Rome forced them to become Arians. But those from the north of the Danube remained Orthodox. The Goths from the territory that forms today's Romania and the Daco-Roman population of this country, round as a disc, loved Bishop John Goldenmouth of Constantinople. Serapion took refuge in one of their monasteries. However, Optatus managed to get hold of him. Serapion was brought into the forum and tortured more cruelly than all the witnesses who had appeared before Optatus up to that time.

Apart from the usual tortures, Serapion had his forehead skin torn off including his eyebrows and his white skull was left bare. Serapion didn't utter a single word against the holy bishop. Optatus then resorted to another means of torture. He had used all the methods of torture that he could dispose of, but all these methods didn't make Serapion speak. Optatus thought that bishop Theophilus might have more means of torture than him, and sent Serapion to Theophilus, the Christian pharaoh of Alexandria, who had condemned John Chrysostom.

The exile of Olympia and the deaconesses

While the investigation led by Optatus continued in the forum with all its apparatus of torture, a new bishop of Constantinople was elected. It was Arsacius, 80 years old, the brother of the old bishop Nectarius, the predecessor in the chair of John the Golden Mouth. The Christians of Constantinople were faithful to John Chrysostom and avoided attending the church where the new bishop served.

Meanwhile, the entire Christian world had adopted the version of the lightning that had fallen on the church and set it on fire. But Optatus couldn't arrest the lightning. He wanted witnesses who would denounce arsonists „whom he could arrest". Since the people didn't want to make false statements, Optatus began to torture the women. The first interrogated was the 35 years old deaconess Olympia. Olympia was one of the Christians who entered the legend during her lifetime. She never slept more than two or three hours, she only ate enough to stay alive and her entire activity was devoted to Christian works and the poor. Her worn monastic robes made more of an impression than the most sumptuous toilets. She was noble by birth, she had a vast culture, she was intelligent, and her faith was so great that her name was known not only in the Roman empire, but to the farthest borders of the barbarian lands. This woman was John Chrysostom's best friend. Optatus called her before his tribunal and showed her the torture devices. Olympia smiled at the torturers and their instruments. She knew that torture was a passing fact. Moreover, with the exile of his holy friend, Olympia considered life a burden. She would have been happy if Optatus had assassinated her, freeing her from earthly life. Sozomen says that Optatus asked Olympia why she set fire to the church of Saint Sophia.

The deaconess replied: „My whole life is enough to refute such a charge. I was once rich, and, as is well known, all my riches were used to build or adorn the temples of God. That's not how I learned to burn them” (*Sozomen, Church history*).

„Oh, I know your life” said the prefect.

„If you know my life” said Olympia calmly „then come down from this court where you sit as a judge and come and sit here as an accuser. Another will judge between us”.

„You are crazy if you don't recognize the new bishop Arsacius”, said the prefect.

Olympia smiled. He asked the prefect whether he had summoned her to accuse her of burning the church or to accuse her of heresy. The prefect suspended the meeting. He invited Olympia to come back a few days later. Olympia knew that actually the crime of setting fire to the cathedral was less serious than the crime of not recognizing the new bishop.

In those times, the citizens were obliged to have the same religion as the emperor. Since Arcadius recognized Arsacius as bishop, all citizens had to do the same under penalty of being found guilty of activities against the empire. Olympia knew this was a serious crime. But she couldn't separate herself from John. She knew that John Chrysostom was a saint and she preferred to bear the consequences of this crime: not to have the same opinion as the emperor. At the second hearing, she said that she didn't recognize Arsacius as bishop, but John Chrysostom. For this, she was sentenced to exile. The other women, who were part of the deaconesses and who had helped John in his work to defend the poor, were all condemned like Olimpiada.

Chapter 14

Comforts and sorrows

Marching between soldiers, John arrived in Nicaea after 10 days. It was the end of June in the year 404. But he didn't know where they were leading him; a real deportation is carried out without communicating to the prisoner, during the journey, the place of his destination. Moreover, neither the soldiers nor the officers knew it. Near Nicaea is a lake called Ascanius. Before reaching the city, the saint's body, which was crushed by fever and the unbearable heat of the June days, revived. „The air from Nicaea strengthened me", John wrote.

Arriving in the city, for the first time since leaving Constantinople, he had a bed, fresh water and frsh bread. But these joys were darkened by the news from Constantinople. In Nicaea he received several letters informing him of what happned after his departure. In Nicaea, John found out how the adolescent reader Eutropius was killed, how the priest Tigrius was tortured and how they were arrested, mis treated and put to death his friends, the poor.

Also from Nicaea he wrote: „I know the cruelties committed by the infamous Arsacius against my brothers, who didn't want to be in communion with him, and how several of them died in prison for defending of my cause. Arsacius is a wolf in sheep's clothing, an adulterer in the guise of a bishop. Indeed, as the woman who during her husband's lifetime has intercourse with another man, so Arsacius is an adulterer, not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit, because,

while I was still alive, he took away from me the church whose husband I am" (*Letter 125 to bishop Chiriac*).

It wasn't the only painful news. Immediately after that, the imperial order arrived to transport the prisoner further. The guards woke up John at four o'clock in the morning and ordered him to set off, telling him the name of the town where he was being deported. Communicating the place of exile was not a favor, it was only a means to increase his sufferings.

The emperor had decided that John should be exiled to Cucuz. It was a name that inspired fear. This locality was on the border of the Eastern Roman Empire, in Armenia Minor. This village, which had only a few houses, had no shops, no roads, but was still famous in history. 50 years before, the emperor had exiled Bishop Paul of Constantinople here. Ever since his arrival in Cucuz, Bishop Paul was starved. The emperor wanted his death at any cost and ordered that he be deprived of water and food. As if by a miracle, Bishop Paul didn't die, although he was not given anything to eat. Exasperated by the fact that the bishop was not dying of hunger and thirst, the emperor lost his patience and ordered him to be hanged. And the soldiers hanged Pavel. The bishop's tomb was in Cucuz.

The fact that Eudoxia was sending John the Golden Mouth into exile in Cucuz was a warning. In this way, it was made known to the holy bishop that what happened to his predecessor in Cucuz awaited him as well: death by starvation or murder.

I got rid of Galatians

The first stop on the way to Cucuz was Ancyra, in Upper Galatia. The journey from Nicaea to Ancyra was a real torture. The guards were ordered to avoid important cities and towns along the entire route. To Ancyra, the holy prisoner walked along an endless, desolate, dusty plain. The rare wells they found on their way were so deep that the buckets could barely touch the water. And when the soldiers in the escort could get a few liters of water from these rare and bottomless wells, this water was willowy, full of salt and had a smell that made you vomit on the spot. The sun burned the prisoner's head like molten metal. The dust was so dense that it made every breath painful.

When they were about to get out of this hell, another misfortune happened. The convoy entered the territory of Bishop Leontie. He wanted to please the empress Eudoxia so he decided to send her the head of Saint John Chrysostom on a plate. So Leontie hired people to kill the saint. Along the way, in all the villages that John was going to cross, he posted gangs of paid killers. These bandits attacked the convoy escorting the prisoner and tried to assassinate him. But the guards, who were ordered to transport the saint in such a way that he would perish on the way, defended the prisoner against the bandits sent by the bishop to kill him. The soldiers and officers had become human. Thanks to their devotion and fidelity, John came out alive from Leontie's bishopric/ episcopate/diocese. When he left this diocese, he wrote: „I escaped from the Galatians" (Letter 14 to Olympia).

Although sick, threatened with death at every step, although suffering from hunger, thirst and loneliness, John's main concern in Upper Galatia was to convert Phenicia to Christianity.

Organizing the conversion of Phenicia

John Goldenmouth decided to Christianize Phenicia. It was the country most refractory to Christianity. John didn't hesitate to use the methods of that time for the conversion of Phenicia and sent there monks armed with spades to demolish pagan temples and with trowels to build churches.

The teams of missionaries that John Goldenmouth sent to Phenicia succeeded in building numerous churches. When John went into exile, Eudoxia began to persecute the Christian missionaries from Phenicia because they had been sent here by John. The imperial authorities of Phenicia were ordered to sabotage them and carried out the order. The missionaries were handed over to the Phenicians who massacred them. The barely finished churches were demolished. The old pagan temples were rebuilt. All these news were communicated to John while he was crossing the desolate plain of Galatia thirsty, hungry, burned by fever, burned by the torrid sun and threatened by the axes of the gangs sent by bishop Leontie to assassinate him. The saint didn't want to give up spreading the word of God in Phenicia. He was a bishop of Christ, and a bishop of Christ must carry the cross of Jesus to all nations.

To convert Phenicia, he needed strong people, real athletes. Just as in Antioch, to save the city from destruction, he appealed to the hermits of the sands, so now, to bring Phoenicia to the true faith, he appealed to the desert loners. In order to convert Phenicia, John organized real battalions of anchorites. He wrote to the priest Constans, to whom he entrusted the management of these missions: „Tell me how many churches will be built each year; how many faithful workers will go to Phenicia; what will be the progress made. I found, in prison, a monk from Nicaea and I persuaded him to make himself available to you to be sent to the same region".

Arriving in Cappadocia and Tauro-Cilicia, John Aur was rescued from Leontie's gangs. The people came out before him not uttering words of insult, as in Leontie's diocese, nor with axes and spades to snatch him from the hands of the soldiers and kill him, but with veneration. At the gates of the cities there were magistrates, priests, officials and all the population that came to welcome and mourn the exiled saint. John the Golden Mouth was received as a king. Cappadocia was for John the land of liberation. He wrote to Bishop Chiriac as follows:

„When we arrived in Cappadocia and in Tauro-Cilicia, I saw running before me numerous choirs of holy characters, countless monks and virgins who all shed abundant tears and wept when they saw me going into exile and said to each other: *it would've been better to see the sun not shining than John's mouth reduced to silence*. This moment moved me and tore my heart, surrounded as I was by people who were crying because of me" (*Letter 125 to bishop Chiriac*).

When John Chrysostom tried to console this crowd that preferred to see the sun go down rather than see John's mouth silenced, the people mourned even more.

Surrounded by armed soldiers like a criminal, walking between two rows of people who threw themselves at his feet and kissed the hem of his garments, John the Golden Mouth arrived at Caesarea. Messengers sent by Bishop Pharetrius approached him and said: „Lord Pharetrius is waiting for you. He is already crossing the road so as not to miss the meeting with you, for he wants nothing more than to see you and embrace you. Lord Pharetrius is even gathering the monks of the city to celebrate your coming" (Letter 14 to Olympia)

John was moved to tears. Even the guards were moved by the imperial welcome given to the prisoner they were escorting. But the population saw that the saint was sick. He could barely stand, his eyes were burning with fever. The suffering endured during the journey was terrible. He told us himself: „The prisoners in their mines do not suffer what I suffered on this journey... consumed by continuous fever and still forced to travel day and night, overcome both by the heat and the need for sleep, I had no one to come to my aid in my lack of everything" (*Letter 120 to Teodora*).

The eyes of the crowd that welcomed him noted the deep traces of the physical suffering endured by the saint. The greatest doctors of the city of Caesarea, Himnetius and Theodorus, made themselves available to John the Golden Mouth. The prefect gave the prisoner one of the most comfortable houses in the city. The doctors took care of him, the authorities gave him honors, and the crowds honored him.

„I am in Caesarea like a sailor in the harbor after a storm... in Caesarea I feel that I have revived a little. Here I drank drinking water, here I ate bread that was neither hard nor moldy, I was no longer forced to wash in a barrel and I could sleep in a bed".

Expulsion

Although he sent messengers before John Chrysostom, Bishop Pharetrius of Caesarea still didn't come to meet him at the entrance to the city, nor the next day or after that. Pharetrius was afraid that Empress Eudoxia would find out that he had visited John Chrysostom. Moreover, he feared that the empress would learn that the prisoner had been received in his city as a saint and a martyr. Bishop Pharetrius didn't want to compromise his episcopal career because of John whom, personally, he didn't love. At the synod that had condemned him, bishop Pharetrius voted for the condemnation. Now, he didn't want to use violence against John, because violence would've outraged the people. He was counting the hours and impatiently waiting for the holy prisoner to leave Caesarea. The day of departure has arrived. John had to leave the city at 4 o'clock in the morning, as the dawn was breaking. It was the time when all the prisoner convoys lay down on the road.

But that night, Caesarea was attacked by the Isaurians. These mountain people had not changed since the time of Alexander the Great. They lived on the tops of the mountains, and the mountains defended them like a fortress. For strategic reasons, they retreated to the heights. They didn't want to be defeated, they loved freedom more than anything. But agriculture couldn't be done on the peaks. Up there, winter lasts almost 10 months. During these 10 months there was no road by which it was possible to enter the country of the Isaurians. They couldn't go down either so, during the other two months, the people went down to the valley to stock up. More precisely, they hunted and steal to have something to eat during the 10 months of voluntary exile on the mountain tops.

This time, it was one of these supply expeditions. The name of the Isaurians spread terror. Neither Alexander the Great nor anyone else in history managed to defeat this people. The Romans didn't succeed either. That night they attacked Caesarea. The Isaurians arrived at the gates of Caesarea on the very night when John the Golden Mouth was to leave the city. The men, old men, women, and children of the city sprang from their beds as one man, hearing the name of the Isaurians, and fought against them and won. The Isaurians didn't manage to enter the city.

Crushed by emotions and lack of sleep, John had a fever. In the morning it was impossible for him to leave, that sick he was. The guards delayed the departure. This enraged Bishop Pharetrius. He was so embarrassed by the presence of John in the citadel that even a single day's delay seemed too much to him. Learning that John the Golden Mouth had not left yet, the bishop armed the monks from the monasteries neighboring the city with axes and pitchforks and ordered them to drive the saint out of Caesarea. The bishop had exhausted his patience. He couldn't wait to leave. He wanted to force the saint to leave immediately. The monks were ordered to massacre the guards and soldiers and burn down the house where they were, if they didn't want to leave immediately. The killing of John Chrysostom would've brought great profit to Pharetrius. The assassination of the saint by the bishop's men would have brought him a great reward from Empress Eudoxia. Pharetrius knew that the empress passionately wanted the head of John the Golden Mouth and would've given anything to have it.

The truce

The armed monks therefore surrounded the house where John Goldenmouth was, as the bishop ordered them, and asked the guards to leave immediately with their prisoner. The officers replied that the prisoner was in pain and couldn't walk. „Leave now, leave now” shouted the monks.

The guards explained that John was too ill to leave the house. Then the monks threatened to set fire to the house and kill John and the guards if they didn't leave immediately. The guards requested the help of the local garrison. But the soldiers were too few in number. Civil and military authorities were alerted. The prefect came in person to calm the armed monks who wanted to kill John and his guards. Later, the prefect managed to conclude a truce with them. He promised the monks that John Golden Mouth would leave the city the next day: for the moment the monks gave up on killing John.

Mobs of scoundrels

The following night, although they promised to wait until the next day for the saint's departure, the monks reappeared in even greater numbers with the very clear intention this time to massacre him. John recounts this attack in a letter addressed to Olympia. He says that the number of monks was so great that the guards decided to set out despite the risk of falling in the hands of the Isaurians who were once again at the gates of the city. The soldiers and officers preferred to fall into the hands of the terrible Isaurians rather than into the hands of the holy monks.

„We are too few to resist these hordes of wild beasts", said the officers to John the Golden Mouth, „we shall perish shamefully. It is better to face the bands of Isaurians than to remain in the power of these scoundrels. We beg you, holy father, let us set out without delay" (*Letter 14 to Olympia*). While the soldiers were talking to John, addressing him with the formula „holy father", the monks and the local bishop wanted to kill him. John decided to leave. He wrote to Olympia how exactly this departure happened:

„In the midst of all these terrors, in the face of almost certain death, though the fever returned and consumed me, I threw myself into a litter, in the middle of the day, leaving my shelter. All the people were there, uttering cries of pain and cursing the author of these unjust things. Sobs issued from every chest, tears flowed from every eye. I then went out of the town. Several clergymen went out one by one one behind us and accompanied us with their sobs. I heard many saying: «You are leading him to certain death!» One of them, who was the most devoted to me, then said to me: «I beg you, leave! It's better to be caught by the Isaurians rather than by our monks. You will be safe anywhere but not among our monks and priests»".

Attempted murder

Defended by soldiers against the bishop, against the priests and against the monks, the holy bishop John Goldenmouth headed to the place of his exile with the risk of falling into the hands of the Isaurians at any moment. After 20 kilometers from the city, the convoy was caught up by a woman from Caesarea, named Seleucia. She was an extremely faithful woman. She stopped the soldiers and fell on her knees before the saint begging him not to advance because the Isaurians were close.

Seleucia said that she had a house not far from there that she was making available to John with all his soldiers, so that he could live until the Isaurian attack was over. John and the guards gladly accepted this offer. They settled in Seleucia's house. It was a very comfortable and bright house, with many servants and solid defense walls capable of withstanding an attack. Seleucia put everything at John's disposal and the guards, after which she returned to the city. Towards midnight, when John had just fallen asleep, the priest Evethius entered his room and woke him up.

In a letter addressed to Olympia, John recounts the scene: „At midnight, the priest Evethius rushed into my room and woke me up from my sleep shouting with all his might: «I beg you, get up, the barbarians are here. They are approaching the house»".

John was taken out of his bed, he was dressed and taken out of the house. But the Isaurians were not there. There was no attack. There was not the slightest danger. Learning that Seleucia had offered her house to John the Golden Mouth, bishop Pharetrius summoned her, threatened to denounce her to the emperor for conspiracy, to anathematize her and, in the meantime, to subject her to torture.

Frightened, the woman began to cry and asked the bishop for forgiveness. Pharetrius ordered Seleucia to leave and drive John Chrysostom out of her house. Although frightened, the woman didn't have the courage to chase away John. She gave the bishop the keys to his house, and he sent the priest Evethius in the middle of the night to drive John Chrysostom out of Seleucia's house.

The priest executed the order. John writes that this priest took him out of his bed with his own hands, then out of the house, and finally out of the yard, throwing him into the street. „It was a moonless night, a thick night, scary. There was no one to help me, no one to accompany me; everyone had left me".

John stumbled at every step. He asked to light a candle. Priest Evethius refused. He replied that the barbarians could see the burning candle. „So the lights were out, the donkey that was carrying litter and that was walking on a road full of boulders and stones, fell to its knees and hit me hard on the ground. I was almost killed on the spot".

Seriously injured, John could no longer climb into his litter. The road was too hard to continue in this way. So they were moving forward. But in the state in which he was, he could no longer walk. He tells that he didn't walk, but crawled: „I advanced very slowly, as if crawling, on steep paths, on mountains with difficulty to cross... consumed by fever, not knowing what was planned; fearing the barbarians, seized with terror and expecting at any moment to fall into their hands".

The Isaurians didn't appear at all. They were nothing more than a pretext to make John cross torrents, to force him to climb the rocks at night, to make him fall into a ravine to die. These were Bishop Pharetrius' intentions.

After 70 days of walking, the saint finally arrived at the place of his exile, in Cucuz. From here, immediately after his arrival, he wrote: „I am now at Cucuz... and safe. Do not fear for me because of the Isaurians... As for me, I fear nothing but the bishops, except for a few" (Letter to Olympia)

Chapter 15

God's judgment

Saint John Chrysostom was at Cucuz. The journey to his place of exile had lasted two and a half months and was over. But in Constantinople, the persecution against the believers and friends of John Chrysostom continued with violence. Any Christian who refused to recognize the new bishop Arsacius was condemned to confiscation of property, exile or death. Having no more churches, the faithful of John Chrysostom performed the Holy Liturgy in private houses. As soon as the authorities found out that the Ioannites (John's supporters) had performed a holy service in a house, it was confiscated. The Ioannitians then took refuge in the forests. But the authorities also chased them through the forests, like a hunt.

The investigation into the Saint Sophia Cathedral fire has been suspended. Not a single policeman was able to arrest the arsonists. And the emperor was of the opinion that God Himself set the fire, that's why Arcadius gave the order to close the investigation, but demanding that all the monks and nuns, priests and bishops sign the act by which they gave their consent to the condemnation of John Chrysostom.

The monasteries that refused to sign, were surrounded by soldiers and left without water and food. Tormented by hunger and thirst, they agreed to the condemnation of John Chrysostom.

Deacon Olympia was the founder of a large nunnery in Constantinople. She had built churches. These nuns didn't want to stand in solidarity with those who had condemned John. But through hunger and thirst, they were driven to despair and signed.

Olympia no longer wanted to set foot in the monastery she had founded. With all her courage and faithfulness, after months and months of persecution, deaconess Olympia collapsed. She fell into an apathetic sadness. John tried to comfort her. His letters burn with faith and friendship. But the Olympia could no longer fight. Then, God Himself began to come to the aid of Olympias and the Ioannites and encouraged them. God began to punish, one by one, those who had condemned the holy bishop John Goldenmouth.

Eudoxia's death

The first person God punished for banishing the saint was Eudoxia. The beautiful empress died on October 6, 404, three and a half months after she decreed the exile of John the Golden Mouth. God punished Eudoxia with a terrible death. The empress was pregnant for the fifth time. The child she was supposed to bring into the world died in her womb. Neither the doctors nor the midwives managed to free her from the corpse she was carrying. The child rotted in her womb. She was in terrible pain and no one could help her. But the decay spread like wildfire. Along with the child, the womb of the beautiful empress, contaminated by the small corpse she was carrying, also began to rot. It was an atrocious punishment, and like all terrible punishments, it was harsh.

Eudoxia struggled without closing her eyes for weeks, holding the dead child inside her while her womb decomposed. She died ugly of suffering, she, who cared so much about her beauty!

Eudoxia was buried on October 12 in the year 404. The crowds knew that God had punished her. John's enemies argued, however, that Eudoxia's terrible death had nothing to do with John's exile. Then God continued to strike John's enemies one after the other to convince them that it was not about coincidences, but punishments from above. All the members of the conspiracy that sent John to Cucuz were hit with spectacular punishments.

Arcadius was restless. He was afraid that the earth would open up in an earthquake and swallow him alive. The emperor was afraid of being eaten by worms, of falling off his horse, of having his tongue swell, of seeing his feet rotting, as had happened to John's enemies, or his womb, as had happened to Eudoxia.

The emperor struggled in panic. For help and defense before God, he turned to Saint Nile, who at that time lived in the depths of the desert.

Rebukes of Saint Nile

Saint Nile had been one of the richest and most elegant people in the Roman Empire. He had been prefect of the East under Theodosius. He had married one of the most beautiful women of the time and had two boys. One fine day, he took one of his sons and retreated deep into the desert, abandoning everything. Saint Nile and his son settled on Mount Sinai.

Emperor Arcadius sent his messengers there imploring him to come to Constantinople, to help him and to ask God to spare Arcadius, not to punish him as he punished the other enemies of John Chrysostom. Saint Nile listened to the imperial envoys, then answered Arcadius: „How do you want me to dare to pray for a city that, through so many guilty deeds, deserves the justice of God who threatens it? Constantinople is a city where crime rests on the authority of the laws and which expelled the blessed John, the pillar of the Church, the candle of truth, the trumpet of God. You ask me to pray for it, but you ask it from a soul too overwhelmed with sorrow from the excess of the evils it has committed" (*Saint Nile, Letters 232 and 233 to Arcadius*).

The emperor sent his messengers once more to beg Saint Nile to pray for the salvation of Constantinople and himself from God's wrath.

Saint Nile answered: „You expelled John, the greatest light of the earth, for no reason, because you were too easily swayed by the bad advice of a few bishops with a sick mind. So think about yourself and, after depriving the universal Church of the pure and holy teachings it received from him, at least recognize your mistake and repent" (*Saint Nile, Letters 232 and 233 to Arcadius*).

Arcadius could rely on three patriarchs of the East, who approved his policy: Arsacius of Constantinople, Porphyry of Antioch and Theophilus of Alexandria, the Christian pharaoh. A month and a week after Eudoxia's death, on November 18, 404, a law appeared (found in the Theodosian Code) which says: „Let the governors of the provinces be warned that they must prevent the illicit gatherings of those who, despising the most holy churches, try to gather else where, and those who separate from communion with Arsacius, Porphyry and Theophilus they must be thrown out of the Church as schismatics".

The chronicler Nichiforus tells us the following about this law: „If one of the bishops refuses to have communion with Theophilus, Arsacius and Porphyry, let him be expelled from his seat, and his property, both money and land, be confiscated".

So John's followers had everything taken from them. The bishops, priests and Jonh's faithful people remained hidden. Paladie cites the case of one of John's partisan bishop who for three years did not leave the room that one of his friends offered him for shelter. The bishops and priests became workers, so that they would not be forced to sign the agreement regarding John's condemnation. Paladie's brother, the chronicler bishop who wrote the life of Saint John Chrysostom, became a gardener so as not to sign something that his conscience would disapprove of. This brother of Paladie was called Brisson and he was also a bishop. The bishop of Troy bought a boat and became a fisherman. However, the partisans of John Chrysostom didn't escape the wrath of the bishops. Discovered wherever they were, they were put in chains like assassins.

Bishop Adelfius

During this time, John began his life of exile in Cucuz. An Armenian from the area, named Dioscorus, made his own house available to the John. It was the most beautiful and the best house in Cucuz. But it was close to the cemetery that contained the tomb of Bishop Pavel of Constantinople, exiled to Cucuz 50 years before and strangled to death here by order of Emperor Constans.

The population of Cucuz was very happy to have a saint and a martyr in their midst. The bishop of Cucuz, Adelfius, loved John so much that he came to offer him everything he had: house, clothes, even the episcopal chair, as John writes: „he gave me his throne and his church as a gift, this man was so kind and hospitable to me" (Letter 125 to Chiriac)

But the climate was unbearable. The village was exposed to all air currents and a "vertical" wind, a kind of foehn. In the course of the same day, it went from a suffocating heat to a sharp cold. There were no roads. The necessities for life were missing. Cucuz was an abandoned village at the foot of Mount Taurus. The friendship of the bishop and of the population were a consolation for John, but they couldn't prevent him from suffering cruelly because of the climate and the privations.

The governor of Cucuz, Sopater, made available to John everything he had. But here people had very little. Cucuz was exclusively a military garrison. The civilian population was as poor as the poor land on which they lived. Everyone was starving. Then a miracle happened. Together with John, all kinds of gifts arrived in this village, coming from all corners of the world for him. Huge sums of money flowed, supplies, clothes.

John writes: „In this country where everything is lack ing, I alone am not lacking anything”; he distributed these gifts to the citizens of Cucuz, and the money he received was used for the christianization of Phoenicia and to help the poor throughout the empire.

Staying in hell

John Goldenmouth was a true athlete of Christ. He had lived 6 years deep in the desert and in caves. There he reduced his nights to three hours of sleep. Only eat once a day. He had nothing but a garment. His bed was a hard ascetic bed, and in his room, apart from the icon of Saint Paul, there were no furniture or ornaments. John had given up all earthly things or, as St. Paul said, all things seen because the things seen are only for a time. John lived on earth only by spirit. He was like a disembodied spirit.

Despite all these performances, John couldn't ignore the winter that had arrived in Cucuz. In this mountain region, the winter was terrible. John was a man of the south, a southerner, a Syrian. When winter came over Cucuz, he was knocked down. He says it himself: „I reached the gates of death and, for two months, I only had life to feel the pain”.

Since the beginning of winter, the cold was so surprising to John that he hadn't left the house since the end of autumn. Dioscorus blocked the windows and doors because the wind blew day and night in cold gusts mixed with snow ready to destroy the house.

Dioscorus moved into John's house to be able to take care of him permanently. The rich merchant did everything he knew and everything he could against the cold. First he heated John's room day and night. But the hot stoves and ovens were even worse for John than the cold. Half an hour after the fire was lit in his room, John was seized by migraines that crushed his brain and began to vomit. This physical torture lasted until the fire was extinguished. John preferred to freeze rather than endure the heat of overheated stoves. His stomach couldn't take it anymore so Dioscorus stopped making fire. John dressed in furs and curled up in bed and didn't leave the bed all winter. This created other problems. Due to the lack of exercise, he no longer had an appetite. His body had weakened to the point where he was nothing more than a shadow. Then came the insomnia. For days and nights in a row, John didn't close an eye.

At Cucuz, during the same day and night, atmospheric pressure and winds varied. Hidden under the covers in his bed, John suffered at the slightest variation in pressure. At the slightest change in temperature he was seized with convulsions and terrible stomach pains. Each seizure lasted for hours. And as soon as the crisis ended, another change of pressure took place, and the tortures began again. The first winter of exile in Cucuz was for John like a stay in hell.

He wanted to christianize Asia

In November 405, after 15 months of episcopate, bishop Arsacius, who had succeeded John the Golden Mouth on the episcopal throne, died. No one mourned him. In his place came Bishop Atticus. Despite the death of Arsacius and Eudoxia, the persecutions against John's partisans became more and more violent. The prisons were full. John wrote to the persecuted that suffering is necessary in people's lives, he tries to console them.

He dealt with the smallest details of the conversion of the barbarian lands. He was so passionate that he took care of everything: the missionaries' shoes, their linen, their food rations. He wanted to christianize Asia.

John became stronger with the arrival of spring. He was able to leave his room and go out to breathe the air of the forests.

However, the two halves of the Roman Empire were thinking of John the Golden Mouth. He was the symbol of Christian heroism. Evidence and testimonies of friendship arrived at Cucuz from all corners of the world. The missionaries who worked under his leadership became more and more numerous. Even when he had been the undisputed patriarch of Constantinople, he had never had greater authority and influence than now. In addition, the spring that frees from the sufferings of winter had arrived. But with spring, the attacks of the Isaurians began: every night they besieged the village where Ioan Goldmouth was exiled.

Isaurians' attacks

Cucuz had become in the spring a besieged fortress living in terror. The Isaurians had a habit of not taking prisoners. It was difficult to transport prisoners on the mountain tops. The Isaurians killed everything they could find. In addition to this terror, the Cucuz also experienced other pains. Although small, Cucuz was the only locality that had a military garrison. The inhabitants of the other villages in the region took refuge here because they knew that there was an army. In their villages, no one could oppose the Isaurians. And with the attacks of the Isaurians, Cucuz was filled with refugees who came from everywhere, whole families. There were a lot of people. A sea of people. Nobody had anything.

And, together with these waves of defectors, diseases appeared. Then the famine. People slept on the stairs of the houses and died in the streets. Although Cucuz was the only locality that had an army, the only citadel where the inhabitants had the illusion that they were defended, one night the Isaurians entered the village. Cucuz was occupied and its inhabitants put to the sword by the Isaurians. John, who wasn't fully recovered after the sufferings endured during the winter, was one of the rare survivors of the massacre.

Not only was John sick and unable to walk, but he was accompanied by his aunt, the 80 years old deaconess Sabiniana, his father's sister, who came willingly to Cucuz to share the exile of her nephew. On the arm of the sick bishop and a praetor named Evethius, the old lady managed to escape from the city on foot, through the snow, the three defectors escaping in the dark and hiding in the snowy forests around Cucuz. They spent the night in the forest. The next day they were in the mountains and they couldn't find their way back.

Besides, it wasn't even prudent to go back. The Isaurians could still be at Cucuz. More days and more nights, John the Golden Mouth, the old woman Sabiniana and the priest Evethius lived without water and without food in the forests. Then they arrived at a fortress called Arabissos. It was a real fortress, not just an appearance of a fortress, like the Cucuz. Arabissos had walls capable of withstanding assaults. John suddenly found himself between the walls of a citadel, without light, in the midst of soldiers. Along with the three escapees from Cucuz, thousands of other refugees invaded Arabissos. And at that very moment, the plague broke out. There was so little food that, in addition to the plague and the attacks of the Isaurinians, the besieged from Arabissos also had to endure hunger.

Other misfortunes came to add to the already existing ones: one night, the walls of Arabissos were breached and the Isaurians entered the city. The carnage was indescribable. The panic in the fortress was hellish. The only person who didn't suffer from fear was John. He slept in his stone-walled cell. Small, hidden in his blankets, he wasn't discovered by the Isaurians. They entered the cell, but didn't see his weak body. Only the next morning did John see the blood and corpses in the fortress, and thus learned that Arabissos had been attacked and looted by the Isaurians during the night. He heard nothing; God protected him from the sight of an attack by the Isaurians.

The enthusiasm of young people

Shortly after the Isaurians attack, a new guest appeared in the devastated and bereaved citadel. A young man, one of the thousands and thousands of young christians who, excited by the christian zeal of John Chrysostom, would have made any sacrifice to be able to live close to the exiled bishop. In the eyes of the christian youth of the time, John Golden Mouth symbolized the pinnacle of virtue and faith. There were thousands of young people who wanted to come to listen to him and feed themselves from his teaching, from the „true philosophy", as the teaching of Jesus was called at that time. The one who had arrived at Arabissos was one of the happy few. He was a young man deacon from Antioch who had left everything to live near John. Together with this deacon named Theodotus, a young noble, also named Theodotus, left for Arabissos. Like the deacon who bore the same name, this young man had left everything to share thebishop's exile.

The corpses of Arabissos, the corpses of the people killed by the Isaurians or those killed by the plague, as well as the corpses of the people who died every day of hunger, still lay in the streets of the fortress. There were too many bodies to bury. Just then, the deacon and the young noble, the two Theodotus, arrived at the fortress. Their enthusiasm didn't decrease. They were looking for John Goldenmouth.

The father of the young nobleman gave him provisions, money, gif ts and everything necessary for living. The father of the young Theodotus was one of the most important officials of Antioch. Ioan Gura de Aur received the two pilgrims with a heavy heart.

He found that the young noble Theodotus was frail and could not stand the climate of Armenia. John reflected and sent the young nobleman back to his father, with a very polite letter and all the gifts he had received: „Accepting your gifts would mean accepting the thing I need the least". John apologized for not being able to keep the young Theodotus with him as an apprentice „whom I would have been happy to keep by my side as a reader and I would've been happy to form and instruct him. But here everything breathes murder, turmoil, massacre and fire. I myself change my residence every moment and often do not know where to lay my head" (*Letter 61 to Theodotus*).

John would send the same answer to all the young people who wanted to meet him in the place of his exile. Because John's martyrdom glory had passed into legend and the whole world was praying for him.

Chapter 16

The rehabilitation of Bishop John Golden Mouth

During his exile in Arabissos, John the Golden Mouth was deprived, as long as the winter lasted, i.e. 10 months a year, of any contact with the rest of the world, because in this season there were no accessible roads.

„During the winter, when everything freezes with cold, when incredible piles of snow block the roads, locked in a narrow cell, without a secretary and with my tongue somehow chained, I kept silent and kept silent for a long time, although against my will; but the spring that opens our roads again has also untied the hindrances of my tongue" (*Letter 128*).

Although lacking means of communication and although the golden mouth of the bishop remained closed, John managed, from his place of exile to lay, with a brilliant intuition, one of the most important stones in the foundation of the Christian Church. John knew that the Church of Christ was one and apostolic on the whole surface of the earth and the governance of this Church had been entrusted to the bishops and that no ordinary person had the right to take their place. When the emperor of the East interfered in this, John Chrysostom addressed bishop Inocentius from Rome, which knew, like John Chrysostom, that the Church of Christ was one and the same on the whole surface of the earth. Inocentius knew that it was the bishops' duty to defend the Church of Christ everywhere it was attacked, that is, all over the earth. And this Church of Christ was under attack in the East. Bishop John was exiled, and „straw bishops" were placed at the head of the Church of Christ in the East.

Inocentius rushed to the defense of the Church of Christ in the East. It was his duty. Inocentius decided to defend Bishop John who was being martyred. In the person of John, the Church was attacked. Bishop Inocentius' advisors were people who appear in calendars today, saints, scholars and theologians. Two of them were Saint Augustine and Saint Jerome. They advised him not to defend John Chrysostom, because this interference in the affairs of the Church of the East could have fatal consequences.

Although he highly appreciated Saint Jerome and Saint Augustine, Bishop Inocentius refused their advice. He told them that there was not an Eastern and a Western Church, but only one Church, that of Christ. Contrary to the opinions of his holy advisers, the bishop fulfilled his mission as defender of the single Church.

And Bishop Inocentius began an energetic action in order to rehabilitate John the Golden Mouth. He thus established one of the sublime traditions of Rome, a tradition without which the power of the Church would not have been maintained during the dark ages of history. In front of this,the emperor Arcadius trembled and together with him the whole Eastern empire. The letters convening a great synod at Thessalonica had been sent. The synod convened by Inocentius was supposed to judge and rehabilitate John. Theophilus, the Christian pharaoh of Alexandria, was summoned before this synod as a witness. The soldiers of the Church of Christ, legates of Bishop Inocentius, were going to Constantinople to take care of the necessary preparations for the convocation of this synod.

Delegation

Bishop Inocentius' embassy was made up of 5 bishops, among whom were Emil from Benevento, Cythegius, Gaudentiu from Brescia. Two priests were added to this embassy of bishops: Valentinian and Bonifaciu, as well as 4 bishops from the East, refugees in Rome. The 4 eastern bishops were: Chiriac, Demetrius, Eulysius and Palladius.

The Roman embassy carried three letters addressed to Emperor Arcadius.

The first letter was from his brother Honorius, the ruler of the West, the second came from Bishop Inocentius, and the third from bishop Chromatius.

The delegation wanted to leave on land. But the plans were changed. A trip like this carries far too many risks. So the ambassadors went to sea. Here is the text of the letter addressed to Emperor Arcadius by his brother Honorius:

„I have already written twice to your majesty that you would be pleased to straighten and correct the things done by the plot against John of Constantinople, things that have not been corrected. Full of solicitude for the peace of the Church which so wonderfully is on the sme path with the tranquility of our empire, I am writing to you for the third time through these bishops and these priests, that you will be pleased to order the meeting of the bishops of the East in a general assembly at Thessalonica. Choosing from among them, men very determined against evil and falsehood, our bishops in the West have sent to you, to obtain from your majesty the convocation of this assembly, five bishops, two priests, and a deacon of the great Roman Church.

Please, receive them with all the honors due to their character, for if they return convinced that the expulsion of John was legitimate, they will advise me to withdraw from communion with him, and if, on the contrary, they are convinced of the wickedness of the bishops of the East, they will try to turn you away from all communion with these scoundrels. With the thought of showing you clearly what is the western sentiment towards bishop John, I chose from the many letter, those of the bishops of Rome and Apulia, attaching them to this dispatch. First of all, I beg your mercy to order Theophilus of Alexandria, who is said to be the author of the misfortunes that grieve us, to participate in the council, even against his will. May - by putting them to work, the synod we are asking for - succeed in restoring the peace that suits our time".

The delegation's martyrdom

The western embassy left Rome towards the end of March. When it reached the eastern waters, two small ships bearing the emblems of the Eastern Roman Empire stopped the ship carrying the ambassadors. The imperial police seized the bishops at high seas, put them on board two ships, and led them al most like prisoners to the fortress of Athyras in Thrace.

Advised by the Eastern bishops, Emperor Arcadius wanted to liquidate this papal embassy. The Roman bishops saw themselves locked up in cells as criminals. The Greek bishops, who were part of the delegation, were immediately separated from their Western colleagues. Chiriac, Demetrius, Eulysius, Palladius were kept for some time in separate cells in the fortress of Athyras, then they were transported on foot to an unknown place. They were subjected to all possible humiliations. For example, during the shutdowns, the four Eastern bishops were forced to sleep in infamous houses. Then their physical and moral sufferings ended, as they were killed by the soldiers, who escorted them, with club blows, kicks, and punches. They died in their faith as martyrs during their journey.

Violence, bribes, attacks

Western ambassadors were subjected to other tortures than those suffered by their Eastern colleagues. First, the imperial police wanted to take the three letters from the ambassadors. The ambassadors refused to hand them over and replied that ambassadors had always had to deliver letters into the emperor's hands. The officers then tried to take the three letters from them by force. The prelates fought and opposed. One of them, Bishop Marianus, had his fingers torn off by the policemen, trying to snatch his letters, but the Roman bishops were Christ's athletes. Seeing that he couldn't succeed by force, Arcadius sent the Roman legates 3000 gold coins - as a bribe - if they would recognize the new bishop of Constantinople, Atticus, and if they would sign a letter by which they renounced the Synod of Thessalonica.

The ambassador bishops refused the emperor's gold. Seeing that he couldn't convince them with force, money, or by cunning, the emperor ordered that the prelates be sent to their home, in Italy. At least this was made known to them. After 4 months of captivity, the bishops were taken out of prison and boarded. But the captain had orders to sink the boat with the ambassador prelates. By a miracle, however, the bishops were saved and returned to Rome where they could tell how they were mistreated in prison. They could show their broken bones and the scars. However, they couldn't say anything about John's fate in exile, nor about the fate of the Eastern bishops who left Rome with them and who, at that time, had already been assassinated. Augustine, Jerome and others advised bishop Inocentius to renounce the synod. However, he wasn't discouraged and refused their advice because he wanted to defend the Church.

Great finesse

Emperor Arcadius and the Eastern bishops understood that bishop Inocentius wouldn't give up before justice was done. Bishop Atticus then had an idea to prevent the intervention of Rome. He proposed to Arcadius to take John Golden Mouth to an even more distant place of exile. He could die on the way. With John's death, his case would be closed. The synod for the rehabilitation of the exile could no longer be convened.

But Arcadius was afraid. The bishops repeated to the emperor that they were taking the sin upon themselves. And because Emperor Arcadius was really afraid, he was promised that everything would be done in a discreet way and that John the Golden Mouth would not be strangled as they had done with the other bishop in Cucuz. Hearing it said that the assassination of John Chrysostom would take place in a delicate, gentle way and with the greatest discretion, Arcadius accepted that John should be killed to put an end to Rome's intervention.

Chapter 17

Sending the assassins

Having received full liberty from the emperor to kill Saint John Chrysostom, the Eastern bishops considered it their duty to carry out the plan. The bishops of Constantinople, with the help of the imperial police, searched for two policemen who were not afraid of blood. They received the order to make John Chrysostom come out of Arabissos and transport him to the foot of the Caucasus, to the town called Pityontis.

The policemen were ordered never to reach Pityontis with their prisoner, but to transport him in such a way that John would die on the way. For this mission, the two policemen were promised what is always promised on similar occasions: money, promotion, a paid leave and, later, a decoration. The police immediately left to fulfill their mission because the bishops were under a lot of pressure. They didn't want to postpone this any longer. They were afraid of John Chrysostom. And to get rid of this fear, they wanted to kill him as quickly as possible.

Palladius writes that, speaking of John Chrysostom, one of the bishops said: „See this fearful dead man, who terrorizes the living and powerful, like a mask that frightens children. Strange thing. Those who, supported by the arm of the state and the wealth of the Church, have in their hands the power to do everything, tremble, pale and are afraid before this priest alone, without a homeland, sick and exiled".

Unconquered by suffering

The policemen arrived at Arabissos towards the middle of June 407. They showed John Chrysostom the transfer order to Pityontis. The saint didn't seem surprised and he was quite clear about their intentions when he saw them leave the road to lead him on a path that only one man could walk. He still walked bravely on this stony road that rose on the ridges of the mountains. The police had actually been ordered not to lead the saint on the roads at all, but only on the paths. They had to avoid not only towns and villages, but also any passerby. During his journey, the saint was not to meet a single living soul. And John went in the direction indicated by the soldiers. He walked through the mountains to the ridges, then came down. He went up, then down. From time to time, he stopped. The soldiers had orders not to let the prisoner rest for a single minute. John had to be forced to walk until his death came. Because this was the mission: tire him until he drops dead on the road.

Then an inexplicable thing happened: the saint did not tire. The saint walked more tirelessly than the young policemen who escorted him. John endured hunger and thirst better than these guards. The thing amazed the policemen so much that one of them thought it was a miracle and tried to save the bishop. The second, however, was unyielding. He knew that if the prisoner didn't die on the way, he wouldn't get the money, nor the promotion, nor the leave. Thinking about all this, he slowed down the stops at the risk of falling sick himself. But the saint walked like a young man without tiring.

The same second policeman invented other means to end the prisoner's resistance. The saint was forced to walk when the sun was at its hottest, in the middle of the day, but even the torrid sun couldn't knock him down. Then John was forced to walk in the heat of June in Asia without a hat. Palladius writes: „Because of the heat, the saint's head had become scarlet like a tomato”. But the prisoner didn't get heatstroke. The same second policeman then tried another method. Everytime it started to rain, the saint had to go on his way, but the rain that flowed on John's chest and back didn't cause him either pneumonia or the slightest cold.

John Golden Mouth walked bravely. Finally, God had mercy on John, His bishop and athlete. God asked John Golden Mouth the same sacrifices as Job. And John gave everything to Him with faith. Just he had turned 58 years old. It was nothing but skin and bones. God, in His great mercy, considered that John Goldenmouth was entitled to rest. And given that for his sacrifices John had the right to a reward, on the night of September 13, 407, when the soldiers allowed John the Golden Mouth to sleep for a few hours a few kilo meters from the town called Comana (because during the entire journey, as was ordered in Constantinople, the saint never slept in a city or a village), God sent him Saint Basilisk.

Bishop John Goldenmouth slept close to the church dedicated to Saint Basilisk, a martyr who was martyred in that place. Saint Basilisk appeared to John in his sleep and told him that he suffered all earthly trials leading to heaven. „Courage, brother John, tomorrow we will be together!”. Saint Basilisk then appeared to the priest who was taking care of the church and said to him: „Prepare a place for my brother John, because here he is arriving”.

Glory to God for everything!

Immediately after the announcement that he would leave the earthly world the next day, the prisoner was awakened by the soldiers who told him to prepare for departure. John asked them to wait until the next day, because he would die at dawn. The soldiers laughed and pushed him down the road with club blows. The day had not yet risen. John obeyed the order, but he asked the soldiers to return and take him to the church of Saint Basilisk. They only had a very short distance to go sp the soldiers accepted. Once there, he undressed. He gave his shoes to the poor. Then he gave them his worn clothes; he gave them his shirt; he gave them the handkerchief with which he wiped the sweat from his forehead. He gave all he had to the poor. All for the poor. He only kept a long white shirt.

And, after giving them everything, he laid down on the tiles that floored the church. He asked for Holy Communion. All this calmly. Then he said: „Glory to God for everything! Amen”. And, dressed in his white shirt, lying on the tiles of the church, John Golden Muth died. He passed into the sky as if nothing had happened. Serene.

Epilogue

Bishop Inocentius fought until the end of his days for John's rehabilitation. The priests and bishops who declared against the holy martyr were removed from communion with Rome. Atticus of Constantinople himself agreed that John's name should be restored to the list of bishops. In the year 438, under the episcopate of Produs, on January 27, the remains of John the Golden Mouth were transferred from Comana to Constantinople. The crowd of poor people and beggars were on their knees and crying calling John the Golden Mouth as if he were still alive. „Father, take back your place on the episcopal chair".

Theodosius II, the son of Arcadius and Eudoxia, the saint's assassins, witnessed this ceremony shedding tears. John Golden Mouth was buried in the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople, the necropolis of the Byzantine emperors. In 1204, when Constantinople was ravaged and burned by the armies of the Fourth Crusade, the Crusaders stole all the precious things of the city and the relics of Saint John Chrysostom. They were taken to Rome, where they were buried in the choir chapel of St. Peter's church, near the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul. John entered history as a martyr and also as the greatest christian orator. Hence the nickname Golden Mouth, in Greek: Chrysostomos (Chrysostom).

The Orthodox Church celebrates Saint John the Golden Mouth both on 27th of January and November 13th every year.

Saint apostle Paul and Saint John Golden Mouth, and his apprentice in the background who wittnesed the scene where Saint Paul appeared and was speaking to Saint John.